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AMDG

Lent 1A - March 1, 2020

I've heard it said that there are two kinds of people in the world - those who know they are God's beloved, and those who do not. Those who know they are God's beloved spend their lives delighting in God's world and bringing joy to others; those who do not, spend their lives vainly trying to make their own lives happy and comfortable, and in the process often making others unhappy and uncomfortable.

And, while I don't particularly hold with statements that begin, "there are two types of people in the world..." there is a basic truth here. I think it's true that understanding who you are and whose you are is one end of the spectrum and not understanding who you are and whose you are is at the other end. Some blessed ones - like the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu perhaps - hang out mostly on this end. And, we can probably think of several characters in the world who hang out mostly on this end. But, throughout life I believe we all wander between both ends of the spectrum. On the one end we have life in paradise, represented in today's readings by the Garden of Eden. We know we live as God's beloved. We want for nothing. Our life is filled with abundance and joy; and we feel compelled to share that abundance and joy with others.

What is life like when we live not as God's beloved? It's a life driven by ego - I want, I don't want; I like, I don't like. This is mine; that's yours. I don't have enough. I'm not enough.

Living Day to day between the two ends of this spectrum, we are challenged by the temptations that distract us from our true identity. Sometimes delighting as God's beloved, sometimes feeling disconnected and separated from God. And, that's what today's readings lay out for us, because, at the end of the day, all the various challenges and temptations we encounter in our lives stem from our tendency to forget who we are and whose we are. As human beings we seem hard-wired to seek happiness and security. When you don't remember who you are and whose you are, we'll do all kinds of things to dispel the

insecurity that naturally comes in life. We'll seek happiness from the things that can provide only fleeting satisfaction. Obsessed with seeking our own happiness and security, we miss the assurance, abundance, and joy God has set out before your very eyes.

The Gospel reading today started at the wrong place. It should have begun a few verses before, at Jesus' baptism. "And ... suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'"

This isn't just Jesus' story; it's our story. We are God's beloved, it is you and me in whom God is well-pleased. God so delights us, always has and always will. There's nothing we can do to make ourselves any more beloved than we are. As God's own, our lives are fulfilled when they are lived as God's beloved. When we know that, when we feel that deep inside, then we lack for nothing, our insecurities are dispelled, our search for happiness is ended; we want nothing more than to share our abundance with others.

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden, is such a beautiful metaphor of our human dilemma. As we consider it, try not to think of the serpent as Satan. I think it's unhelpful when we try to pin our own poor choices on some supernatural being. Rather, think of the serpent as your own ego manifest as insecurity. It is our insecurities, not knowing who we are and whose we are, that leads us to venture out on our own. Just like Adam and Eve. (And you all get that Adam was right there when all this was happening. Don't be fooled into thinking this was all Eve's fault.) Here they were in paradise, wanted for nothing. But then their egos got in there, those insecure egos. "Maybe I don't have everything I need. Maybe God's holding back on the good stuff. Maybe there's something better, something shinier, something tastier." And, it's in that insecurity they chose to forge their identity on their own, independent of God, and so they take and eat the forbidden fruit, the fruit that cemented their irrational insecurities, leading them to seek their own protection and their own happiness. This is certainly the story of all of our lives, seeking safety and happiness in all the wrong places.

Jesus' encounter with the devil is the complete opposite. The devil also tries to undermine his relationship with God by suggesting he is not

secure as God's beloved, that he should test it by throwing himself off the mountain, or that he should go his own way by creating food for himself, or that he should accept fame and fortune from the devil's hands rather than trust God's provision. But, Jesus resists each attempt to undermine his identity as God's beloved, not just by quoting Scripture, but by quoting Scripture that reminds him of God's trustworthiness, the need to depend on God for all good things, and of God's promise to care for him and all God's children. This is the life abundant we were intended to live.

Adam and Eve forgot whose they were and so lost themselves in the temptation to secure their identity on their own. Jesus falls back on his secure relationship with God, reminding himself who he is and whose he is, a dependent, but beloved, child of God – dependent on the providence, care, and protection of the God who has promised to do anything to care for him and all of us.

There are so many temptations in this world. And, they come not as fruit hanging from a tree but as subtle messages that undermine our identity and invite us to forget whose we are. Our consumer-driven economy bombards us with suggestions that we are inadequate, that if we don't have this particular thing, this new model, that shiny object, then we are insignificant. Our culture pushes us to be better than others, to achieve more, and acquire more than our neighbors. And so many political leaders – of all parties and of all nations – work to convince us that we have a great deal to fear, that enemies surround us on all fronts, and that if we just follow their agendas we will be safe and secure. In the face of so many identity-obscuring messages, it is more important than ever to remind ourselves of the baptismal promise that safe-guarded and empowered Jesus - the promise that reminds us that God says we are so totally enough, that there is plenty to go around, and that we need not live in fear.

Lent is our annual focused opportunity to remind ourselves of this great truth. It's our opportunity to restore our confidence in God's providence, care and protection, and to recognize our tendency to seek joy outside of God's grace. During Lent we use the very potent spiritual tools of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving as a sort of reset button to help us live closer to the paradise end of the spectrum. None of these tools has power

in and of themselves. We gain nothing in God's eyes by giving up meat for 40 days. However, when we apply a little discipline to let go of something we know clouds our awareness of who we are and whose we are, we can be more mindful of the things we are avoiding, and are able to be more present to the reality of living in God's abundance. One of the disciplines I am practicing this Lent, has to do with my phone. I know I spend entirely too much time fiddling with my iPhone - reading email, checking the weather, watching newsfeeds, looking at my messages, and many other silly distractions. It separates me from those around me. And, when I'm alone, it distracts and removes me from being present to my life in the moment. My phone, which is a useful tool for connection to others and to the world, has become an obstacle to connection. So, I'm practicing the discipline of a phone fast. I'm keeping it in my pocket during meals and conversations. I'm paying attention to the times I do pull out my phone, and asking, "is it necessary, or is it distracting me from what's going on around me?" And, on my Sabbath - which is Monday - I am not checking email at all. I know this will allow for more time with those around me, and will keep me living in the present. I'm confident that this fast along with my other Lenten disciplines, will strengthen my relationship with God by making me more present to God, to others and to myself. I hope it will continue after Easter. Fasting, prayer, and almsgiving are powerful tools, but only when we apply them mindfully and with the purpose of strengthening our relationship with God.

My brothers and sisters, we are each one of us God's beloved. God so delights in us and wants nothing more than to prove his love for us, if we will only stop trying to go it on our own. Let us keep a holy Lent by using the tools of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving to remind us of our belovedness and help us live our lives delighting in God's abundance, made manifest for us in Christ Jesus.

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who

lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## Old Testament

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

## The Response

Psalm 32

Beati quorum

1 Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, \*  
and whose sin is put away!

2 Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, \*  
and in whose spirit there is no guile!

3 While I held my tongue, my bones withered away, \*  
because of my groaning all day long.

4 For your hand was heavy upon me day and night; \*  
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you, \*  
and did not conceal my guilt.

6 I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." \*  
Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

7 Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of  
trouble; \*  
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.

8 You are my hiding-place;  
you preserve me from trouble; \*  
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

9 "I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; \*  
I will guide you with my eye.

10 Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding; \*  
who must be fitted with bit and bridle,  
or else they will not stay near you."

11 Great are the tribulations of the wicked; \*  
but mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord.

12 Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the Lord; \*  
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

The Epistle  
Romans 5:12-19

As sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned-- sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.

And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

## The Gospel

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,'  
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.