

<read text Col 2:6-15>

It began with one man. He had been given a simple command. **"...you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,"** It was enough that God had asked him to do it but God also attached a warning, **"for when you eat of it you will surely die."** (Gen 2:17) We don't know exactly how much time passed between the end of creation, when God declared everything "very good" and the time that Adam ruined it all. Adam failed his responsibility as a husband, as leader of his family, he stood by silently while his wife listened to the serpent and joined with her in eating of the forbidden fruit. And there was death. The image of God which they had been created in was destroyed. They no longer knew or understood God's will. Their human reason and intellect was damaged, they tried to hide from a God they knew was everywhere, and they tried to make excuses to a God they knew was all-knowing. In their new state they accused each other and even God of being responsible for this mess. In this willful act of rebellion, Adam had killed himself spiritually and numbered his days on earth. And in doing so he destined every human after him to inherit the same curse from him.

You and I are no exception. We are born into this world in the same state that Adam found himself in after eating that fruit. Spiritually, every human is stillborn. **"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,"** Paul writes. (Eph 2:1) God has standards! God demands perfection, complete obedience and compliance to his will, to his law. But we were born dead to God's will. Even if we knew it perfectly, we couldn't possibly carry it out. A dead person cannot do anything! It doesn't matter how simple the task was, or how easy it was, we simply cannot do anything God would us to do while we're spiritually dead.

In fact it goes even beyond inability to carry out God's will. We are told **"the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."** (Rom 8:7) Not only are we incapable of carrying out God's will in our spiritual death, we don't want to even if we could. Our natural self, the sinful flesh, is an enemy of God. It cares nothing for God and wants nothing to do with him. It hates him. And as we stand by nature, as sinners, God hates us. Between the natural sinful man and between God there is a great division, the chasm of hatred that the Bible labels enmity. Our sins separate us from God. Even if we were alive enough spiritually to come to him, our sins would still separate us from him. It is as though a great canyon were between us. Even the best of us could only get partway across before falling to our death, and spiritually dead as we all are, we cannot even move enough to roll ourselves over the edge. We cannot possibly approach one who is so holy in our natural state.

And in that state of spiritual death and sin, we've rung up quite the list of offenses. God's record-book lists them all. It lists the law in its one word on the cover: "Love." And inside, under the tab with your name, is listed every time you've failed to love properly. They're broken up into ten easy categories. There's all the times you've loved something else more than you've loved your God. There's every time you soiled the Lord's good name by your words and actions in the world. Every time you've despised his word or neglected to worship him regularly. Whenever you've disobeyed the people God's placed in authority over you or only obeyed them grudgingly. Anytime you've wanted to hurt anyone else with words or actions. All your perverse sexual thoughts and deeds, all your greed, all your lies, all your covetousness. It's all written down, the record being expanded every day, and it's all ready to be read at your trial before God at the end of your time of grace on Earth. And whenever we stop to think about the things that are written there, the charges that are really against us...well it makes me a little queasy.

The sentence? The just punishment for our state and our actions is to have that spiritual death confirmed. To have it set in stone forever. God would say, "You have lived dead to me, and dead to me you will now remain forever." The grace that God shows us on this earth is to be removed from us and we suffer eternal death in hell, where the fire is never quenched and the suffering never ends.

But that is not what God wants for you and I. Even though the punishment is fair and justly deserved, God wants us to live. If that were not the case, he would have erased creation as soon as Adam ruined it. But he was not willing to condemn even just those two to hell. Instead he promised to fix our mess by himself. On the day of Good Friday the bookend to what started with Adam begins. What that one man began in Eden was finished there on the cross and all the problems he created were ended there.

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross." (v13, 14) That which Adam caused through his one act of

rebellion was made right through Jesus' act of obedience. While we were dead, while sin still clung to us, God took up everything that separated us from him, our sins. That record of all of our wrongs, of how much we owed him because of our crimes, he took that record and nailed it to the cross with Jesus. Where it says here **"having canceled the written code...that was against us"** is actually much stronger in the original language, it could be translated instead "having obliterated the record of debts against us". The verb means "to remove as to leave no trace". And that is exactly what has happened. The record of our wrongs has been obliterated, and the written code, the Law of God no longer threatens us, it no longer keeps track of our sins. Nailed to the cross, our sins died with Jesus. And that great barrier that was fixed between us and our Lord because of our sins has now been removed. You can't get any more obvious about it than what happened as Jesus took his last breath. The great curtain in the temple that stood between the people and the place where God's presence dwelt was torn in two from top to bottom. No longer was it only the high priest that could go beyond that curtain and approach God once a year. Now because of the erasure of our sins, everyone has access to God at all times. Sin no longer stands between us and our God because it was put to death on the cross.

The canyon that separates us from God has been filled in. Sin has been removed and our access to God is restored, but that does not solve the problem of us being born spiritually dead. As I said before, a dead person cannot do anything. We still cannot close the distance between us and God on our own. We need our God to fix this for us as well. As Paul writes, **"In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."** (v11, 12) It is at our baptism that this condition is reversed. We, who were dead already, were buried with Christ. After Jesus proclaimed the work finished, after he gave up his spirit, he was taken down from the cross. He was wrapped in linen and laid in a nearby tomb. The stone was rolled in front and Jesus was buried. We went with him to the grave. And all the sin and guilt went with us to the grave. And then we were made alive again. The Holy Spirit created faith in our hearts through our baptism and we were raised from spiritual death to life. But here's the best part, all the unholy things that clung to us beforehand, they were left in the grave. Our record of sins was left buried there, our death sentence from God was buried there, our hatred of God and our slavery to our sinful nature all remain buried. Because Jesus was buried in our place, all that evil could be buried with him.

At our baptism, in our burial and resurrection with him, he circumcised out our sinful nature, cutting off the sinful flesh from us and leaving us a new creation free of it. Yes, our sinful nature still exists right now, it still is hiding within us trying to get out and take control...but it is no longer in control and it is no longer permanently attached to us, it has been cut apart from us, and like Adam after the fall, its days are numbered. Our sinful nature hasn't changed one bit. It still hates God, it still wants to rebel against God at every opportunity and it still is under a death sentence. But it no longer is an inseparable part of us. Yes we struggle against it, but it doesn't control us any longer. The sinful nature isn't running us any more, the new life that God created in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, that's what's in charge. Of course the power of that new nature risen from the grave doesn't come from us, the power of the new man comes from God, it comes from the Holy Spirit. And the only way that we stay connected to the Holy Spirit is by staying connected to God's word. God's word is what keeps our new self alive and without it, without regular study, we could slide ourselves back into the grave where our sin and sentence of death are buried. So we need to stay in the word of God, regularly hear and learn it. Not just once a week, but every day. As Moses said to the Israelites before he left them, **"They are not just idle words for you—they are your life."** (Deu 32:47)

Before we were dead to God. Unable to do anything that he considered good. Every action was an offense and an affront to him. But he set us free from that when he cut off our sinful nature, broke its hold on us at the cross and buried it in the grave with Jesus. It is as good as dead to us. Ruin and misery are all it ever brought us whereas our God went to unimaginable lengths to rescue us from a mess of our own making. So leave your sins buried in the grave. Treat your sinful nature as you would something dead. Live the will of God in your lives, not because you have to, not because we will be judged on our performance, but live God's law because you *can*. Give up the ways of the dead and follow your new nature. Love God and each other, because it is the *better* choice and you have now been given the power to choose it.

We were buried right along with Jesus, and now that we have risen to a new life with him, leave the dead things in the grave. Live as someone who is free of the slavery of sin. And stay connected to the power of the Holy Spirit, which feeds the new self and keeps us alive in Christ so that when we are buried in body here we are truly buried with Christ before us, looking forward to that day when we will rise to live a new and holy and perfect life with him forever. Amen.