Follow Jesus Sermon Series

"Follow the Tree" -- 1 Peter 2:24

Lent Midweek 2 Sermon

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

In Genesis 2:9 it has been revealed to us that there certainly are three trees that God has provided and these remind one of the three crosses on Calvary's holy mountain. It is most certainly true that "out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the Tree of Life also in the midst of the garden, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil." One tree leads to death and the impenitent thief dies to all eternity because of it and because of his unbelief. Another tree leads to eternal Life and the repentant thief departs in peace though pinned to the wood of this world's tree. But behold, the Lord Jesus is also suspended from a tree!

Which one is that? The answer seems obvious and therefore it is not. Thus, as the Church ponders the invitation to "Follow the Tree" on this eventide, keep one truth always before you, both this night and for as many days as you travel on your personal exodus from the land of bondage to the promised land; namely, the truthful declaration of Jehovah's Good News for you, and as it is proclaimed by Peter in his first epistle, chapter 2, verse 24:

He [Jesus the Christ] Himself bore our sins in His Body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Oh Man, do you not behold all these trees before you? All of them are - each and every one of them is - a part and product of the creating Word Whose litany of "Let there be" brought all, you included, oh Man, into existence, into being. "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

There, oh Man, in the midst of the Garden of Eden is the Tree of Life. You have the right to eat of its fruit. Take and eat for this tree and the fruit thereon is given for you. If you do break your fast and consume the fruit of this Tree, you will live forever in your present condition ... holy, perfect, sinless, innocent and in communion with your Creator. The Tree of Life is for you and it is good for you. The eating of this Fruit bestows Life in the beatific Presence of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit for all eternity.

Over there, oh Man, also in the midst of the land where one river divides into four, there is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. You have no right to eat of this tree. Its fruit is not given for you. You shall not take and eat the fruit thereon, for it is not given to you, "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Genesis 2:17) ... unholy, imperfect, sinful, guilty and excommunicated from

your Creator. While the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is most certainly good, it is not good for you. Eating results in death and separation from God in the lake of fire for all eternity.

Behold, oh Man, the rest of the good trees that have been created and planted in the perfect soil of this eastern garden. These trees are the trees of this world and they are for you. You may eat the fruit of these trees. Take and eat.

This he did, but not the fruit of the trees of this world and not from the Tree of Life. Sadly, awfully, tragically, the man failed to defend his wife from the temptation at hand and he stood by permitting her to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Not discerning the Word of God, he communed himself and ate to his own judgment. As the LORD God Almighty had promised, "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin" (Romans 5:12).

What was to be done? Adam looked to the trees of this world as a place to hide himself and as a source of covering his shame. He led his wife in impenitence and they went to a fig tree - and stripped leaves from it to cover their nakedness. Then "they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3:7). They were confronted with their sin and given the promise of their Savior Who would be the Seed of the woman.

"And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live for ever' - therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the Tree of Life" (Genesis 3:21-24).

So there we have it. The eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil has resulted in death and we have been removed from the presence of the Tree of Life. What are we left with in this land of death that groans under sin? Two realities for sure - one is the Word of God's promised Savior - and two, all the trees of this world.

From one tree or another man has fashioned and hewn items for good and for evil. A shepherd's staff for leading sheep and a peyote pipe for being led. An Asherah grove for pagan worship and a rocking chair for a grandma and the baby. As nation rises up against nation, spears morph into catapults ... some for defending, some for attacking. Wooden watchtowers stand as city sentinels permitting the watchmen to tell of the night.

God even makes use of the wood from these trees of the world. According to the divine specifications, Noah constructs an ark made of gopher wood (Genesis 6:14) and the Church is saved therein. The son of Father Abraham carries the wood up the mountain for the sacrifice where God provided a substitute offering for Isaac. Trees are cut into timbers before they are fashioned into the doorways of God's people. They are then daubed with the blood of the lamb and the Angel of Death passes over the families of the faithful. Acacia wood is used to construct the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. The son of David ordered timbers of cedar and cypress for the construction of the Temple (1 Kings 5:10). Years later, people gathered from the trees of this world and presented wood offerings for use in the Temple rites (Nehemiah 10:34).

Follow the tree, for a day came when the orders went out for some timbers. Of what type of tree it was, we do not know. The beams would have to be small enough to be carried about while being substantial enough to support the weight of a man on numerous occasions and to receive multiple nailings. Three such timbers were received and man put these dead trees into service. If you follow them you will behold them being carried through the streets of Jerusalem to a point outside the city gates. Three men are carrying them ... two thieves whose names we do not know and one draftee, a passer-by named Simon of Cyrene, "who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus," (Mark 15:21) to carry the cross upon which Jesus would be crucified.

Which tree is Jesus on? It is not the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, though Jesus does suffer because of the disobedient eating of that tree. The Christ is not suspended from the Tree of Life, for that is in the Presence of God. Jesus is on this world's tree - a dead tree fashioned by and for man, and planted in this cursed ground and watered by the bloody sin of man. Here are the wages of sin ... the wrath of God against all transgressions, the hell of being forsaken by the Father, the payment that no man could pay but is required of each. Here is the perfect example of what God said regarding the guilty man in Deuteronomy - "If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is accursed by God; you shall not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance" (21:22-23).

The Man on the middle cross is the Son of God, Who was sent down from heaven by the Father to take the sins of the world upon Himself - for both Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, young and old, you and me. The Apostle Paul proclaimed this in his epistle to the Galatians, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us -- for it is written, "Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree" - that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (3:13-14). Or, as Peter wrote and you are to commit to memory this night, Jesus "Himself bore our sins in His Body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." Here, on this dead tree, hangs the only Fruit in all the trees of this world of all the centuries past and of all the years to come that gives eternal Life ... Life now and Life forever. Here is the promised Savior Whose death gives such Life as it had been promised in the Torah, preached by the prophets and sung throughout the psalms of the Old Testament. Jesus Himself bore our sins in His Body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." "And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a tomb" (Acts 13:29).

All sin is atoned for and, in addition, the Devil is defeated. Do you not know understand the proper preface for Lent prior to the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Emmanuel? You remember it for you heard last Sunday and will hear it again this next eighth day,

"It is truly meet, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God: Who on the tree of the cross didst give salvation unto mankind that, whence death arose, thence Life also might rise again; and that he who by a tree [the Devil by the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil] ... that he who by a tree once overcame, might likewise by a tree [by the Cross of Christ] ... by a tree be overcome, ..." ("The Lutheran Hymnal," p. 25).

This is the message of the Christian faith that has been courageously taught and preached by the Church and to the Church and the world. The Apostles did so even before those who would silence

them.

"The high priest questioned them, saying, 'We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' But Peter and the apostles answered, We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus Whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him'" (Acts 5:27-32).

Thus the Church lifts high the tree, the love of Christ proclaim, 'til all the world adore His Sacred Name." Thus the Church follows Christ crucified, risen and ascended. At the end of the journey, whether it be your personal exodus or the end of history if it happens before then, you will partake of the Tree of Life. Or, as Jesus Himself dictated His Word to the faithful in the Church militant ...

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life and that they may enter the city by the gates" (Revelation 22:13-14).

Until that day when you behold the Tree of Life, remember and recall how and when Jesus "Himself bore our sins in His Body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." Amen.

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen" (Revelation 22:20-21).