

**The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 13, 16 & 17, 2006
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI**

LOVING IS DIFFICULT Genesis 3:8-15

Loving is difficult. We all have different ideas and concepts when it comes to the word love. Some people look on love as a special feeling that you have for someone. People will talk about falling in love and then falling out of love. We talk about loving our husband or wife, our children. People talk about loving a certain food or a certain vacation spot. People talk about loving God. Does everyone mean the same thing when they use the word “love”? Probably not. As we continue our study of the first three chapters of Genesis we have a demonstration of true love as we see God deal with the disobedience, unbelief and rebellion of our first parents, Adam and Eve. As we examine carefully what happened in Eden after the first sin we learn that **LOVING IS DIFFICULT**. Our heavenly Father teaches us that **I) Love Requires Confrontation** and **II) Love Includes Forgiveness**.

LOVE REQUIRES CONFRONTATION

Confrontation, coming face to face with someone, is not something many of us relish or enjoy. Many of us will try and avoid confrontation at all cost. Why is that? We usually want peace. We don't want an argument or conflict with someone. Plus we may have problems keeping our temper and not becoming angry or self-righteous as we deal with something that someone has done. But confrontation is necessary if we are going to resolve problems and deal with disputes. We can't ignore them and it doesn't do any good to talk to someone else about it who has nothing to do with the situation. That is often the manner in which we choose to handle problems and disputes. We close our eyes and assume it will all go away. Or we spend all our time and energy talking to others about how hurt and upset we are because of what someone else did to us rather than going to that person and talking to them about it.

What did our heavenly Father do when Adam and Eve believed the devil and then ate from the fruit of the tree that God commanded them not to eat from? Did God just turn his back and say, “I'll ignore it. I'll let them stew for a while. Let them see how it feels to be afraid and guilty.”? No our God did the loving thing. Why? Because the Bible tells us that “God is love.” (1 John 4:16b) In his great unconditional love God confronts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. What do Adam and Eve do when they hear God in the Garden? They run and hide. Why? Because they're afraid. Why are they afraid of God? They were never terrified of God before. What has changed that has brought this fear and terror to them that they are running away and avoiding their Creator and loving heavenly Father? They are guilty. They have eaten from the tree that God told them not to eat from. They now know evil and it is not a pleasant experience.

Look at how God comes face to face with them. The manner in which he confronts says much about love and is something we can certainly learn from. God calls to man, “Where are you?” Didn't God know where Adam and Eve were? Of course he did. Then why call out for them? He wants to begin a conversation with man. So God does not rush in like a bull in a china shop, overturning trees, hollering and screaming at man. He does not point an accusing finger at them. He merely asks where they are. Adam responds, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” (v10) God doesn't lose his cool here. We might be saying or screaming, “What on earth have you done? You've ruined everything. You just can't listen can you?” But God proceeds to ask some more questions, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” (v. 11) God brings it all to a head. But notice not with accusations and blaming. God simply asks the question, “Did you eat from the tree which I commanded you not to eat from?”

Look at Adam's answer. Does it sound familiar when you confront someone or someone confronts you? Adam said to God, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” (v. 12) Adam shifts the blame. God, it's not my fault. It's your fault. If you hadn't put that woman here with me, this

would never have happened. Then Adam turns on his wife, “she gave me some fruit.” Ever since that time we have played the blaming game. Never take responsibility for your actions. Always blame someone else. It is never my fault. We see that daily around us. When a child turns bad, it’s the parents fault. Even the child will blame his parents that it’s their fault that he gets in so much trouble. He refuses to take responsibility for his own actions. When Peter denied that he even knew who Jesus was, did Jesus say, “Well, it’s my fault. I should have done a better job in training him so he wouldn’t have done that to me.”? Or when Judas sold our Lord out for thirty silver coins, did Jesus take responsibility for Judas’ actions and blame himself? No absolutely not. These men were responsible for their own actions. It was not because they had bad parents or a bad leader and teacher in Jesus. It was because they chose to follow the devil’s temptation and not believe and serve their Lord. Well, finally Adam does admit “and I ate it.” (V. 12c) Is he sorry? Who knows? He reluctantly admits that he did sin.

God now turns his attention to Eve. He asks her, “What is this you have done?” (v. 13b) Again God is not accusing. He is simply asking questions and seeking answers. Eve’s response is much like her husband’s. She is a quick learner. She heard Adam blame God and her for his disobedience so who can she lay blame on? Eve says to God, “the serpent deceived me” (v. 13c). The devil made me do it. God, I was tricked by that snake. She doesn’t want to take responsibility for her actions either. However, she finally admits as did her husband, “and I ate.” (v. 13d)

Now you would expect God to lower the boom. Right? He should be casting these people aside. They have ruined his perfect world. They have made a mess of everything. What’s he going to do? Most of us know what we would do when someone hurts us, we have a tendency to lash back and try and hurt that person as much as they have hurt us. But that is not love. For you see love includes forgiveness. Once Adam and Eve have admitted that they have wronged God, God now proceeds to deal with the devil and to give a life and world changing promise to Adam and Eve.

LOVE INCLUDES FORGIVENESS

Instead of beating Adam and Eve to hell, God now turns to the serpent and he curses the snake. God says to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.” (v. 14) Evidently at that time snakes looked somewhat different than they do today. Maybe they had legs like a centipede or some other creature. But not any more. From that time on snakes slithered through the dirt. They were cursed because the devil had used them to deceive Adam and Eve and lead them into unbelief and rebellion against the commands of God.

After cursing the serpent God does something that is unbelievable. He promises the human race a rescuer. He says that this deliverer will restore the broken relationship between the human race and himself. He promises that his anger and justice will be satisfied by the special seed of the woman. Listen to what God says to the serpent, “I will put enmity (that is, hatred) between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.” (v. 15) The picture that God uses is that an offspring of the woman will crush the serpent’s head. We know that in order to destroy the power of a snake, you don’t snip off its tail. You need to crush its head. In the process of crushing the head of the serpent, the serpent strikes the woman’s offspring in the heel infecting him with the serpent’s poison and leading to suffering and death. This promise was the promise of the Savior Jesus who was crucified for us. He is the fulfillment of what God guaranteed to our parents in Eden. This promise also foreshadows the virgin birth. Throughout the Old Testament we read of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, referring to the male sperm. Here God speaks of the seed of the woman not a man. Two thousand years ago in the town of Nazareth a young teen age girl comes up pregnant. She is engaged to be married to a young carpenter in his early twenties. When Joseph learns that his fiancé is pregnant, he naturally assumes that Mary has been unfaithful to him. Joseph has three options – 1) he can take Mary as his wife and have everyone assume that they had pre-marital sex; 2) he can have Mary publicly stoned to death for adultery or 3) he can privately end the marriage and divorce Mary and send her out of town to have the child elsewhere and not bring more public disgrace upon her. Joseph decides to divorce

Mary. Once he has made that decision an angel appears to him and says, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20b-21) Matthew then makes this comment, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has said through the prophet: The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means, “God with us.”” (Matthew 1:22-23)

God forgave our first parents. Did he do it because they were so sorry? Recently I read an article where someone indicated that they could not forgive someone unless they were truly sorry and admitted their wrong. The statement was made, “Even a 6 year old boy knows when he’s done wrong he needs to be truly sorry and admit it. Then forgiveness and mercy can be graciously offered.” (Watertown Daily Times – September 8, 2006) Thank God that is not how he offers forgiveness. Did Adam and Eve openly admit they had done wrong? It took some questioning before they reluctantly admitted they had eaten of the fruit. But they made all types of excuses and blamed others for their actions. Were they really sorry for what they had done? We aren’t told. We know that they felt shame and were afraid of God because of what they had done. Yet God still forgave them? Why? Because they were sorry? **NO!** God forgave them because God is love and love forgives all things.

That is how God deals with you and me. He forgives and forgets our sins. He does that because the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, has rescued us by living the perfect life and crushing the serpent’s power through his innocent death on the cross and his triumphant resurrection from the grave.

Now God says to you and me, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:31) Is this easy? Not at all. Just as it is very difficult to confront people with their sins, so it is just as difficult to forgive them. You see, loving is difficult. But thank God he continues to forgive us and empower us to be more kind and willingly to confront. His forgiveness of our sins causes us to be more ready and willingly to forgive others as we have been forgiven by our heavenly Father.

Amen.