**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Clothed with Grace”**

Rev. David K. Groth

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“*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 themselves loincloths.*” (Genesis 3:6-7).

 Before the Fall, it says, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25). Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with each other, with God, and with their surroundings. Therefore, nakedness was natural and unproblematic. No ticks or thorns or inhospitable weather. Nothing to be self-conscious about: no fatty deposits or toenail fungus or unsightly bruises. No fear of criticism, no memories of hurtful words or unwanted advances. None of it. There was no awareness of anything that could produce shame.

 By the way, that’s the only verse in the Bible where nakedness is ***not*** associated with shame. Everywhere else, it’s always connected with some form of humiliation. For example, the poor contend with nakedness (Job 24:7). Nakedness is also a sign of guilt and shame, as when Noah had too much to drink (Gen. 9:20-23). And of course, it’s in reference to being completely dependent. “Naked I came from my mother’s womb; naked shall I return”(Job 1:21).

 God told Adam and Eve, these trees and all their fruit are for you. Just don’t eat from this one, or you will surely die. Reasonable enough, right? But the devil promises if they eat of this tree, they will be like God, knowing good and evil. This poison Eve drinks with her ears. She eats the fruit with pleasure, and urges her husband to do the same.

 Even as they are still chewing, the eyes of both are opened, and they realize they are naked. Immediately, they feel shame, a first for them and for mankind.

Shame is a complex emotion. It’s a mix of embarrassment and humiliation, distress, guilt, dread, and fear of consequences. This is a new sensation for Adam and Eve, and they don’t like it. Their shame urges them to hide. They wish for invisibility.

 What exactly is the problem with nakedness? I think it has something to do with being known. It’s being seen without the defensive armor of clothing. We are not willing to have all our physical flaws put on display. We know how judgmental people can be, how they can make one an object of ridicule. The same is true of our hearts and minds. Who of us would want to live in a world where everyone can read your mind? That would be shameful too!

 Adam and Eve hate this new sensation of shame. But rather than running back to God, Adam and Eve try fix the thing themselves. It’s all so sad and pathetic. Adam and Eve try to cover *themselves,* stitching together some fig leaves. I don’t imagine that working very well. Moreover, I suspect the mere sight of those miserable coverings served to remind Adam and Eve of their foolish disobedience and of their horrible fall from supreme joy and happiness into extreme trouble and adversity. Those fig leaf coverings preached to them, but it was all Law.

 Clothing sure does not serve *that* purpose anymore. We no longer see our clothing as a reminder of our sin and rebellion. No, we take pride in a new outfit. We spend all kinds of money on clothes. Some have brazenly lost any sense of shame, and wear clothing that is intended to reveal, accentuate, and entice rather than cover.

Most women do not want to be objectified like that, reduced to mere objects of desire. It denies them of their personality, their intellect, their values, their contributions. It’s dehumanizing. And yet, with what they wear, some women objectify themselves and *invite* the lustful gazes of men. It makes me think of what the Lord said in Jeremiah, “They have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush” (Jer. 6:15).

 Sin has its consequences. For Adam and Eve and for all future generations, childbirth will be accompanied with much pain and heartache. Child rearing will be no picnic either, even when the children are adults. Adam and Eve would watch one of their sons become a murderer. No matter your calling, work will be toilsome. And of course, because we sin, we die. Our bodies eventually wear out and succumb.

 There ***is*** hope in this chapter. There is another promise, this not coming from the lips of the great deceiver, but coming from the voice of God. Hear what God tells the devil. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.”

Up to this point, Adam and Eve did not think of the devil as an enemy, and that’s a problem! When the devil was tempting her, Eve listened to the devil as if he were a trusted friend and mentor. They followed the devil’s advice as if he had their best interests at heart. Sounds like what Adam and Eve most need is enmity, which is the spirit of hostility and hatred toward the devil. And that’s what God gives them. The devil pretends to be in your corner, when in truth, his aim is to destroy you. It’s not okay to hate people, but it is okay to hate the devil. *That’s* the right use of hatred. So, God gives Adam and Eve (and you) this gift of enmity.

 “I will put enmity . . . between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel.” It’s clear God is also talking about a person. He’s talking about Jesus, the promised Savior who would be the descendant of Eve and overcome all the offspring of the devil.

 Jesus knows the devil for what he is – a rebel, a liar, and a murderer. And so, Jesus took human flesh in your defense. As true man and true God, Jesus overcame our enemy through His own death on the cross. He had done no wrong, nor was their any deceit in His mouth (Is. 53:9). And yet, Jesus was stripped of His clothing before being crucified. This means even as He bore your sin and guilt on the cross, He bore your shame too and your humiliation. He was stripped of His clothing, so you could be clothed by His grace, His innocence and righteousness.

 Our text gives us the first hint of this great gift. Back in the Garden of Eden, God does not send Adam and Eve out into the world with just those miserable fig leaves. Verse 21, “And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.” What a gracious thing He does for them. First, they need good clothing, because now there are ticks and thorns and inhospitable weather. Now, there will be the fear of criticism, and memories of hurtful words and unwanted advances. So, it’s a gracious, thoughtful thing that God covers them over. The sight and feel of those garments also preach to them, but it is all Gospel. God knows they are fallen, and yet has not turned His back on them. Their Creator is also their preserver.

But there’s more. To provide garments of skin would require the death of animals. God sacrificed animals He created for the preservation of human life. The animals are innocent. Mark Twain wrote, “Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to.” But God sacrifices animals for the preservation of human life, beginning with garments of skin for Adam and Eve. It carries on with sacrifices of atonement, the innocent for the guilty. God forgave His ancient people through sacrifice, most often, through the sacrifice of lambs. God won forgiveness for us through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, “who knew no sin . . .” (2 Cor. 5:21).

As He provided garments of skin for Adam and Eve through sacrifice, so He covers over your shame and guilt through the sacrifice of His Son. Galatians 3, “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (v. 27). What a blessing that is! Isaiah 61, “My soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of His righteousness” (v. 10).

Last week, we had an adult baptism, and one of our ladies knit together a beautiful baptismal shawl large enough to completely wrap a grown woman. For those who were not here, I wish you could have seen the smile on her face as she was enveloped and heard these words, “Receive this white garment to show that you have been clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness that covers all your sin. So shall you stand without fear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the inheritance prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Imagine that! Standing without fear before the judgment seat of Christ. It makes me think of Psalm 32, “Blessed [happy] is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered” (v. 1).

If you let it, sin and shame will accumulate over the years. It can become a crushing load and destroy any sense of self-worth. But Jesus has taken on your shame Himself. He endured the cross, scorning its shame (Heb. 12:12). You do not have to carry the crushing weight of shame because He already has. Romans 8, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (v. 1). That is, if you believe and are baptized, on the Last Day, you too will *stand* before the judgment seat of Christ without fear, not on your own merits, but on His. Romans 10, “Whoever believes in Him will never be put to shame” (v. 11). All praise be to God! Amen.