In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My opening text is from our First Lesson, from Genesis 3. Adam and Eve have already fallen. They have already eaten from the forbidden tree. The deed is done. Now we learn about the consequences of sin — not only for Adam and Eve, but also for each one of us. Verse 8 from our story goes this way:

8And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8, RSV)

Look! I have us a visual aid here. Look at this stack of volumes. They are Martin Luther’s eight volumes of lectures on the book of Genesis. This was a mature work for Luther. He devoted the last ten years of his life to working on Genesis. He wrote it at the end of his life, after many years of experience and thought about Holy Scripture. It is a masterpiece of theological commentary on the Bible. Whenever I want to preach on Genesis, I find myself hastening to Luther to hear what he has to say. [I am going to ask Vicar Caleb Douglas to take this stack of volumes away, lest I knock them off the edge of this pulpit.]

Sin lets loose suffering on earth. Sin unleashes misery — misery for us, for our loved ones, and for our neighbors. Here are the consequences of sin I think we can discern in this ancient story of Adam and Eve.

1) Sin causes fear in us.
2) Sin harms our intellect. Sin makes us stupid.
3) Sin tempts us to betray others, even those close to us.

So those are the bad consequences of sin.

But there is a good consequence of sin too: In the mercy of our Maker, sin receives a Savior. I mean Jesus Christ. He is our Savior. There is no need for the devil to have the final triumph in our lives. As far back as Adam and Eve in the garden, the Lord gave them hope of what Luther called “the Crusher.” Luther is referring to the Descendent of Adam and Eve who would one day crush the head of Satan. And so sin has this good consequence: Not because of any merit on our part, but because of the mercy of our Maker, sin yields a Savior. A terrible cost is borne by this Savior, but our God would not have us
to be lost but rather to have eternal life in a world where sin and death and the devil no longer troubled us.

Let us start with the bad consequences of sin. The first one is fear. Listen to what Luther has to say about the miserable fear into which sin casts us. He contrasts how casually Eve speaks with the serpent before she and Adam fell, back when they were still innocent. They had never known fear! Wouldn’t that be great! To not even know such a thing as fear! But once they had eaten of the forbidden tree, they are now haunted by fear. Luther notes how fearlessly Eve speaks with the serpent back when she was still innocent, back before she had disobeyed the Lord. Luther says this:

With what great unconcern Eve listens to the serpent! We do not talk so intimately with a puppy that has been raised in the home and has been made accustomed to it—or with a chick. So, then, before sin they did not look for hiding places; but because they had understanding, they stood upright and praised God with uplifted face. But now they are terrified by the rustling of a leaf. Oh, what a grievous downfall, to plunge from the utmost sense of security, from confidence and delight in God into such awful terror that man shrinks from the sight of God more than from the sight and presence of the devil! Adam and Eve were not avoiding the devil; it was God, their Creator, whom they were avoiding! Him they judged to be more troublesome and more dreadful than Satan.¹

Think back with me, if you would, to our childhood, when we were more innocent and less experienced with sin. Perhaps you can remember the fear that sin launched upon us. I remember the time the telephone repair man came to our house, back when I was a child. He left the back doors of his repair truck wide open. There were all of these nuts and bolts and switches and wires, and I felt I just couldn’t help myself, and so I took something. Oh what misery I was then in. I had stolen something. I knew it was wrong. I lived with terror of being found out for many days until at last I came to my mother and I told her what I had done. She said that she knew what I had done. The telephone repair man had seen me. He raised no protest, he did not rebuke me, but he did tell my mother. It occurs to me now that I am old, that maybe we were all at our best back when we could be frightened by sin. Let us not so harden our hearts, that we can disobey God and hurt one another and simply go on our merry way, not fearing much, perhaps not even believing anymore

in the Last Judgment. There is a kind of holy fear that trembles at the Day of 
Reckoning and that grieves to hurt our God who has been so very good to us. 
Adam and Eve in our story this morning are newcomers to fear. They are still 
capable of fearing the day when they disobeyed the Lord. In their fear, they 
try to hide from the Lord, which is a pretty dumb thing to do, and that leads 
me to my second point about the consequences of sin: sin makes us stupid. 
But before I leave this first point, please ask yourself whether it isn’t so about 
fear. Is it not the case that when we disobey the Lord we thereby cast 
ourselves into a world of fear? If we commit fraud, if we steal from the bank, if 
we commit adultery, if we cheat on the exam, do we not throw ourselves into 
a world of threat and terror? And who needs that?

Let’s move to the second point: Sin hurts our intellect. The thing about God 
is that he is the creator of reality. And therefore any step away from God is a 
step away from reality. That cannot be good for our thinking. Philosophers 
and scientists, for example, might try to convince you that you are simply a 
combination of biochemical and electrical processes. Do not believe them. The 
Bible does not want you to go down that road—a road that for some people 
could well end in madness, violence, or suicide. The Bible speaks of you as 
having a soul and of being made in the very image of God. Likewise, it might 
sound like a brilliant move to depart from the ways of the Lord in our 
dealings in our business or with our neighbors, but if we are not careful, our 
business associates and our neighbors might just end up thinking that we are 
pretty stupid!

Luther points out that when Adam and Eve disobey God and eat the 
forbidden fruit, they end up hiding from God, but not from Satan. And that is a 
poor trade! Luther says this:

For where should the heart in its fright flee from the 
presence of God? To the devil? This is neither an 
advantageous nor an advisable thing to do, and yet it 
turns out this way. ²... look at the stratagem by which 
Adam and Eve think they are safe...is it not the height of 
stupidity, in the first place, to attempt the impossible, to 
try to avoid God, whom they cannot avoid? In the second 
place, to attempt to avoid Him in so stupid a way, that 
they believe themselves safe among the trees, when iron 
walls and huge masses of mountains could not save 
them?³

² Luther, M. (1999). Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5. (J. J. Pelikan, H. 
³ Luther, M. (1999). Luther’s works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5. (J. J. Pelikan, H. 
Sin has led humanity to do some pretty dumb things. Let us not participate in the very decline of our intellect. Let us seek that wisdom that consists in love of God, of reality, and of our neighbors.

Next, let us speak of betrayal. That is the third consequence of sin we can discern in this story of Adam and Eve. Betrayal of others is a sin and a failure of love. But this story warns of us something else too: Sin often tempts us toward betrayal. Betrayal is sin, yes, but also sin can lead on to betrayal. Sin can tempt us to throw others under the bus and to associate with other exceeding sinners, so that in the end we no long care how many people we hurt.

Luther uses a fascinating phrase to speak of the power of sin to multiply itself and to lead on to other sins. Luther uses the words “its own gravitation”:

Thus sin by its own gravitation always draws with it another sin and brings on eternal destruction, till finally the sinful person would rather accuse God than acknowledge his own sin. Therefore the statement “The woman whom Thou didst give to me” is full of resentment and anger against God, as if Adam were saying: “Thou hast burdened me with this trouble. If Thou hadst given the woman some garden of her own and hadst not burdened me by making me live with her, I would have remained without sin. Therefore the guilt for my having sinned is Thine, since Thou didst give me a wife.”...This is the last step of sin, to insult God and to charge Him with being the originator of sin.

Children sometimes do this: they blame their misstep on someone else. They pretend that their brother or sister did it, not them. But as we grow up, we can become more clever in blaming others for our misdeeds. We can blame our boss or commanding officer. We can blame colleagues. We can say, “But everyone is doing it.” Or if we become particularly wicked, we can set things up so that someone else takes the fall for what we have done. Adam tried to do that. He tried to make his own wife, Eve, and then even God

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himself to take the fall for the sin he, Adam, had done. It is an unfair and unkind way to treat others. Sin tempts us on toward betraying others.

So, those are some of the bad consequences of sin: fear, dullness of mind, and betrayal of others. Now let’s finish up by speaking of what the theologians call the “proto-evangelium” or the first proclamation of the Gospel. It concerns what Luther calls the Crusher. He means Jesus Christ. The words are directed against Satan and go this way:

15I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15, RSV)

With these words the Lord promises that one day a Descendent of Eve would crush the head of Satan. Satan shall bruise his heel, but this Descendent of Eve shall bruise the head of Satan. Well, Satan certainly did hurt Jesus. If bruising the heel of Jesus refers to the crucifixion of Jesus, then Satan certainly did hurt Jesus. But the resurrection of Jesus crushes Satan and means that Satan’s end is coming. Luther says that this promise of the Crusher bruising the head of Satan is a beautiful text. Listen to what Luther says:

About this a most beautiful text now follows, in which the preaching about Christ is included.7...What follows pertains properly to the devil. It also gives this sound comfort, that now the devil is no longer in a position to rage and do harm as freely as he would like and as he would do if there were no woman’s Seed.8

Under this protection the church is safe; Satan not only cannot attack the church with open force, but also in other respects his tyranny and his malevolence have been broken. Otherwise he would not permit a single tree to reach maturity. He would hinder, nay, even choke everything that is brought forth by the earth. In one single moment he would put an end not only to the birth of


But he can't! Satan cannot destroy the church, and therefore cannot destroy the world no matter how much he hates humanity, because he must wait for the birth of Jesus Christ, who will crush him.

Luther makes a really good point about this proto-evangelium: he says that the Lord does not curse Adam and Eve, but he does permit Adam and Eve to overhear his curse of Satan. This is so that Adam and Eve can have some hope in this world. Humanity can look forward to a better world. Luther puts the matter this way:

Thus the sun of comfort, previously enveloped by black clouds, rises above the clouds and with its most welcome light shines on their frightened hearts. For Adam and Eve not only do not hear themselves cursed like the serpent; but they even hear themselves drawn up, as it were, in battle line against their condemned enemy, and this with the hope of help from the Son of God, the Seed of the woman. Forgiveness of sins and full reception into grace are here pointed out to Adam and Eve. Their guilt has been forgiven; they have been won back from death and have already been set free from hell and from those fears by which they were all but slain when God appeared.

And that, my friends, is where we stand. Although we have sinned, like Adam and Eve before us, and though we are not really worthy of friendship with God, nonetheless he has drawn us up, as it were, in battle line against our condemned enemy. We have been drawn up into the battle lines with Jesus, the Crusher, to whom belongs the glory with the father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen