

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

The Garden of Promise

Dear Friends in our Savior Jesus Christ,

It all began in a garden, the Garden of Eden. God the Almighty broke into our world and announced the very first gospel promise. Without this promise there would be no Lent and there would be no Easter. There would only be death and damnation for us. But the seeds of our salvation were first planted in this Garden of Promise.

No doubt, you remember the tragedy that occurred in that first Garden:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ ” “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Satan had planted the seed of unbelief by tempting Adam and Eve to sin. They no longer believed God’s words. They ate the forbidden fruit. That single seed of unbelief immediately sprang to life and, reaching out like some horrible death-plant, wrapped its creeping vines around this man and woman to squeeze the life out of them.

They felt the squeeze of God’s decree: **“The day you eat of it, you will surely die!”** They didn’t turn to God for mercy. They didn’t look to him for a second chance. Instead, they ran for cover and tried to hide from God.

The death-plant produced a foul fruit: enmity. They felt nothing but enmity—hatred, hostility. In other words, the opposite of peace. They shook their fists at God. They shook their fists at each other. They shook their fists at Satan. They were quick to blame God for their circumstances. They were willing to throw each other under the bus if it would save their own skin. What had seemed like such inviting friendliness from Satan was now seen as it really was—a malicious trick to destroy them. They had unwittingly become teamed with this serpent who hated them and wanted them doomed like himself. Inside and out, they now felt the permeating, damning hatred that a holy God has for what they had become. It was sheer terror.

But God announced a reversal of that enmity. Speaking to the devil, God said, **“I will put enmity between you and the woman.”** God would change things! The woman wouldn’t be an ally to the devil anymore. God would create enmity between her and the devil. God would put her at odds with Satan.

That had to mean that she and God would be reconciled and be at peace with each other and be friends again! Because to be an enemy of Satan is to be a friend of God! So this gospel promise in the garden was really an announcement of friendship! And this announcement of friendship was not offered to the woman only, but also to her husband and to all their descendants—that means you and me. God said to the snake, **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers.”**

Doesn’t this make your mouth hang open in wonder and awe?! God did not advise Eve to redirect her hatred toward the serpent who created the problem. He did not command her to hate the evil one. And he didn’t urge her to reach up to heaven with her prayers to invite this change. The fact is, when God did give her the opportunity to fess up, she couldn’t do it. She utterly lacked the desire and the power to change her affections and save herself. It was impossible!

So God would do it. He said, **“I will put enmity between you and the woman.”** God cut off the creeping vines of death at the roots and saved the lives of Adam and Eve by promising to send a Savior.

But who would this promised Savior be? He would be the offspring of the woman. In other words, the promised Savior would be true man. But God also said this to the snake: **“He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”** Satan would be crushed. The only one in the universe powerful enough to do that is God himself. So the promised Savior would also have to be God. True man and true God. The promise from this first garden was that the Savior would be both.

In the process of crushing the serpent and saving human beings, the promised Savior would have to suffer—the serpent would strike his heel. As true man, Jesus would step into our shoes. He would be our substitute. He would take on himself the blame for all sin from the very beginning in that first garden to this very day. He would let the life be squeezed out of him. But as the death-plant’s creeping vines would tighten their grip around him, they would be snapped and torn away, because as true God, Jesus is too large and too powerfully innocent for death to keep its hold on him.

Now his victory over death is our victory over death. You see, Jesus broke death’s grip not just as God but also as a man. Now, since he is a man like us, he shares his breakout from death—his success in coming back to life—with you and me and makes it our success. Jesus once said, **“Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19).** Death has no more of a grip on people who trust in Jesus than it does on Jesus himself.

God said, **“I will put enmity between you and the woman.”** With this simple garden promise, the Spirit of God took these two fallen creatures—Adam and Eve—lifted them up from the dust, restored their love for him, consoled them, and rescued their lives. With these words, they were forgiven by God and made God’s eternal friends and Satan’s everlasting enemies. Pay attention to this! God intervened and repaired what was broken. So great is his love for human beings! So great is his love for YOU! God refused to wait around up there in heaven for you to decide to do something about your own salvation—because that would have never happened! Just as it would have never happened with Adam and Eve.

To this very day the Spirit of God works the same way in you and me as he worked in them. He comes from heaven and makes it happen. Through his simple gospel promises and through his Word connected to water in Baptism and bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper, he forgives our sins. He lifts us up, restores our love for him, consoles us, and rescues our lives. That is how he has promised to come to us. We’re saved not by our own decision or by our efforts but by God’s working through his Word and sacraments in us. The Holy Spirit puts enmity—hatred—between us and Satan by making us God’s friends when he breathes faith in Christ into us and comforts us with God’s assurance of salvation.

The promise in that very first garden set the stage for the history of the entire world. **And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”** That promise is what the rest of the Bible is all about. It announced the coming of a Savior who would bring about reconciliation between us and God. Therefore the focal point of all Scripture and of all history is the time and place where the promise was fulfilled—on a hill outside Jerusalem called Golgotha. Everyone throughout history who believes this will be saved. Everyone who does not will be damned.

One would think that in our minds the Garden of Eden would be a synonym for *death trap*. But because of the first gospel promise, all kinds of life has sprung forth from it! Through faith in that promise, people are saved. It is the Garden of Promise. Look into that garden and hear that promise. And believe not only the promise, but that it was fulfilled in Jesus and be saved! Amen.