

LENT: A TIME TO FOLLOW JESUS TO THE CROSS

First Sunday in Lent

February 10, 2008

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Psalm 32

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

They Were Naked

Have you ever had one of those dreams where you find yourself in school, or on a busy street, or in the middle of the mall and realize you're not wearing any clothes?

In the case of Adam and Eve, however, theirs was not a dream but a living nightmare, the consequence of straying from God's word. Put aside for a moment the question of sin, and pay attention to their emotional experience. When they realized they were naked, they knew how exposed, how vulnerable they were.

They were as naked as an addict who has hit rock bottom. As naked as a politician whose lies are no longer believed. As naked as an ordinary family whose credit has collapsed, and whose home is in foreclosure. As naked as truth being confronted by deception and evil.

One usually thinks of Lent as a time of repentance for sin. That is most certainly true. Sin and evil is something we all confront. But when the consequence of sin lands upon us, it is perhaps no longer important how we got into the mess.

Many times, in fact, we deceive ourselves or are deceived into believing that the harmful things we do actually make sense. We think surely the serpent has a point, and it will be a good thing to know the difference between right and wrong. Surely that Bible-quoting presence in the desert is offering a great opportunity for personal gain. Why wouldn't the world be better off if *we* were on top?

Going down that road, there always comes a moment when such reasoning falls apart. The craftiness of the snake, the smooth talk of the devil, the new-found knowledge of the man and woman, none of this is any help. "They saw what they had done, and they realized they were naked" (Genesis 3:7a, *CEV*). And our attempts to cover it up, to fix it up, usually work about as well as sewing fig leaves together.

Believe it or not, this is a moment of grace. It feels awful to be exposed as a fraud, a failure, a fool. It is frightening to be faced with truth, to dangle on the precipice between

ruin and rescue. Yet, it is the first step back toward the garden. Not back to that long-lost idyllic place, but to a place that cultivates new life – without fig leaves.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Paul Bellan-Boyer, Parish Deacon at St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Jersey City, NJ.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Benin – With thanks to God for revitalized relations between the Bible Society and the Churches, and with prayers for God's blessing on translation, distribution, literacy and *Faith Comes By Hearing* projects; **Togo** – With thanks to God for the Moba New Testament translation which is at the final checking stage, and for the Mina New Testament which has been printed and is due to be launched, and with prayers for translation teams working in the Lama, Kabiye, Bassar, and Mina languages; **Ghana** – With thanks to God that the country's 50th anniversary of independence in 2007 provided opportunities to distribute Scriptures and with thanks to God for the distribution of one million Bibles to schoolchildren, the first Dagbani Bible, and the Fante New Testament on audio cassette, and with prayers for the Dagaare Bible translation, the completion of the Ewe project, and the Akuapem Twi, Asante Twi and Fante revision projects.

Activity Corner: “Spiritual Nourishment” Calendars

Supplies needed: photocopies of 8-1/2 x 11 calendar pages (with boxes for each date) for the months of February and March 2008; pens or pencils.

The Old Testament lesson from Genesis focuses on a choice made by Adam and Eve. The New Testament lesson from Matthew's Gospel focuses on Jesus' response to the devil's temptations. The season of Lent offers us a disciplined time to reflect on choices we make each day in light of how those choices may or may not nourish our spiritual life.

People often talk about things they plan to “give up” for Lent; i.e., sweets, watching television, etc. Invite members of your household to think about ways they plan to choose to expand their opportunities for spiritual nourishment. Instead of thinking about things to “give up,” encourage them to think of things to “add on;” i.e., spending more time in daily Bible reading and prayer; attending additional opportunities for Bible study and worship; reading devotional books; reading Bible stories to younger children; volunteering one's time for community service, etc. Throughout the days in Lent, ask each member of your household to write down their choices (what they plan to do each day) on copies of their calendars, beginning with February 10 through March 22. At the end of each week, discuss as a family your reflections on your activity choices and their impact on spiritual nourishment. Consider keeping a family journal of these thoughts and reflections.

