

3-1-20 (First Lent)

No longer all for one, but One for all.

By Rev. Sheryl Stewart

Genesis 2: 15-17; 3:1-7 Romans 5: 12-19 Matthew 4: 1-11

Psalms 32

Summary: We all followed Adam's error by choosing other ways than God's, but Jesus' choice for God redeems us all.

My friend Claire Long always said, "We are Easter Christians with a Christmas heart." Yet to get to the fulfilled Christmas promise of Easter, we must move through Lent, a time of repentance and taking steps to bring us closer to God. We all repent as we all are like Adam in that we find ourselves following the example of the first human.

That example is set right away, as early as Genesis 2 and 3. God makes one rule, "Don't eat from the tree of Knowledge of Good and evil." We have not made that particular bad decision again, probably because Eden and that tree have been hidden from us. Nonetheless, we have all chosen to go in our own directions or follow bad advice. Just as one rotten spot on a single fruit spreads to an entire sack, so that one rotten choice of Adam's has spread among all our race. All lost for one.

Therefore, the Advent scripture which relates Isaiah's prophecy that "those who dwell in deep darkness have seen a great light" is true. All of us are in the dark; the entire world has fallen, and we can't get up: not by ourselves. Yet, the

bad news that we who in so many ways violate the laws of God, is completely offset by God's love. Heaven, which would be denied to all, reaches out to Earth through Jesus to lift us up. That is one for all!

Paul explained this process thoroughly in our Romans scripture. Death has spread among us all like a cancer, but the gift of healing is not like the tumor that started this disaster. For, Paul says, if by the sin of one many fall, not only does the pure life of Jesus pick us all up, but Christ brings us to God.

So, we now enter the forty days of Lent, a time of giving wrong directions up with hope because what God has already given up for us is so much more than anything we might abandon. And giving up what, exactly, will please God?

The Gospel lesson is the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Satan says, "Make these stones bread, test God's love by risking your life, or get all worldly power and more things than the Kardashians if you just worship me instead of God."

It is too easy to try to copy Jesus' denial of those temptations by giving up chocolates or fast food. Such self-denial would only please God if our food choices were truly harming His temple, our bodies. If you fast, the fast God chooses to abstain from selfishness and give generously to the poor. Better yet, give up

vengeance or blaming for Lent and forgive instead. Turn away from competing and fighting for forty days and learn to work and live together in peace and harmony.

If you must forgo material possessions, take these forty days to find an item each day that is still useful but no longer used or wanted and donate it to a charity: Community Action, Care Net, Hands 4 Hope, or the like. If Jesus' choice redeems us all, we must give back in the same sacrificial pattern which He has modeled for us.

Sacrifice is not, as we so often see it, simply denying ourselves; it is putting God's Will first. Worship God, not self or Satan. Soon, we will have communion, making Jesus a living part of our bodies, minds, and lives. If we do so and live like Him, as He promised we would with His help, we will be as my dear friend Claire named us: Easter Christians with a Christmas heart.