

+++ In the Name of Jesus +++

Title: A Flood of Grace

Date: Sunday, February 22, 2026 (the 1st Sunday in Lent, series A)

Text: Romans 5:12-19

¹²Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned –

¹³To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

¹⁵But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ¹⁶Nor can the free gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the abundance of God's grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

¹⁸Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in acquittal that brings life for all people. ¹⁹For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

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Every time I run across some sort of warning about the earthquake risk in our area, I think back to that terrible earthquake-and-tsunami that struck the east coast of Japan almost exactly 15 years ago. From what I understand, the risk of a tsunami right here in this area is pretty low, because we're far enough "up" the Salish Sea that most of the energy from a big wave coming down the Strait of Juan de Fuca (and around the corner, up to us) would have dissipated by the time it reaches us.

Even so, I can't help remembering the astonishing power of that tsunami back in 2011. Til then I had always assumed that a tsunami was just one giant wave that sort of came crashing on through, and that was that. I had no idea it could be hundreds of metres long and could just kind of roll over everything for such a long time. Japan had excellent detection systems that were able to give a full minute of warning even for the earthquake itself that produced that tsunami. Public drills (like our "ShakeOut" events here, every October) tried to help everybody prepare. There were earthquake kits in every public building. And most of those buildings were designed in the first place to withstand a lot of shock. But none of that really turned out to help very much when the forces became *that* powerful.

I remember being struck (in particular) by the fact that there were so few people in most of the videos I saw of that tsunami. Had they already escaped? I knew that that was probably just a naive hope... and yet I couldn't help *searching* for hope, in the face of that kind of devastation. Without hope, that catastrophe would have just been far too overwhelming.

In a sense, though, all that that tsunami really did was "speed up" the flood of death that's already been inundating the whole human race since the dawn of human history. As I'm sure you noticed, that is half of what St. Paul was talking about, in today's second reading—the *unbreakable monopoly* that death has always had, since Day One. Sometimes, I think we sort of assume that death is mostly a consequence of the fact that each of us keeps on breaking all of the particular rules and regulations God commanded us to live by, in the Ten Commandments. What Paul is telling us here, though, is that that's not the whole story. God did not even give those Commandments to Moses, you see, until sometime around 1200 BC—which (if you remember) was what we heard

about in last week's Old Testament lesson. But even before *that*, Paul tells us here, "**death reigned, from the time of Adam to the time of Moses**"! (v.14) Adam and Eve (in other words) were literally the last people *ever* who had a *choice* about whether to die or not. "**Stay away from this one special tree in my garden,**" God said, "**and you will live! Eat from that tree, and you will die.**" Because Adam and Eve made the wrong choice, not only the two of them, but every single human being after them, has had to face the tidal-wave of death, sooner or later.

In some ways, that just doesn't seem very fair, does it? In our culture, we put a lot of emphasis on *individual* responsibility. And that's also the point in many parts of the Bible. A good example is found in Ezekiel chapter 18, where the prophet shares a little parable that unfolds over 3 generations.

- First, a grandfather obeys God and lives.
- Then, his son is a rotten scoundrel and dies because of his sins.
- Finally, *his* son—the grandson of the righteous man in the first generation—this grandson once again follows the Lord and lives.

To underscore the point of that parable, God himself speaks—right before it, and right after it, using exactly the same words both times. "**The soul that sins is the one who will die.**" (Ezek 18:4, 20) That's the principle that you and I are used to, isn't it—namely, that each of us stands on our own before God, as an individual.

Here in this reading from Romans, though, we are seeing the other side of the coin—a totally different perspective on death, that needs to be *held in tension with* that emphasis on individual responsibility that we see in Ezekiel.

- Here, Paul says that "**death spread to all people, because all sinned**" (meaning, "way back *then*, at the time of Adam!"). (v.12)
- Again, a couple of verses later Paul tells us that "**many died through the trespass of the one man.**" (v.15)
- Then he tells us again (a third time!), "**death reigned through that one man.**" (v.17)

In some strands of Hebrew thought, you see, ancestors were thought to have already been carrying around within themselves the "seed" of all of their descendants. In the book of Hebrews, for example, we're told that Abraham was already carrying around "**in his loins**" his descendant Levi, who was born four generations later. (Hebrews 7:10) Obviously that's not *biologically* correct, but it does make a certain kind of *spiritual* sense. And that's the sort of logic Paul is using here too. When Adam sinned, it didn't just mess everything up for Adam, only, but for every human being who comes along after him too, because of this spiritual sense of *solidarity* in which we *were* "already there *too*," way back there at the dawn of time. The hymn that we're going to be singing at the end of our service picks up on all of this in a striking and powerful way, when it begins by saying: "**In Adam we have all been one—one huge rebellious man; We all have fled that evening voice that sought us as we ran.**" (*Lutheran Worship* #292, v.1)

According to this way of thinking, see, what happened there in the Garden of Eden was the *earthquake* that set into motion this worldwide *tsunami* of death that will, one day, sweep you and me away as well. Our own individual sins confirm our guilt and make that sentence more certain—though, as you may have noticed, that is not a subject that Paul even *mentions* here in this part of Romans at all. The trigger for death that he dwells on *here* is *not* your or my individual sin—but the result of that *one* catastrophic, death-dealing decision that was made by somebody else, at the dawn of all of our collective history.

Again, does that seem fair? Probably not, right? How can you and I be *blamed* for something *we* didn't even do? If that was how those ancient Hebrews decided to think about it—well, *OK fine*, good for them! Today, *we* prefer a *different* theory of justice, putting the stress on our own individual acts, and personal responsibility.

But... *but*... BUT! Before we “go all in” on personal responsibility, and “rule out” a more collective understanding—maybe we ought to look at *the other half* of what Paul is talking about, here in this reading. Our *escape* from death’s tsunami *also* comes about (Paul says) *not* because of any particular good decisions you and I might happen to make, but because of what *one other person* did, to unleash a flood of God’s grace!

Did you notice this clear and repeated and very powerful contrast, running like a thread all the way through this reading?

- On the one hand, *yes*, there’s Adam—whose *one single* act of disobedience brought condemnation to us all, resulting in death.
- On the other hand, there’s Christ!—whose *one single* life of obedience brought to us all “**a righteous standing**” before God, that results in life. (19)

Paul doesn’t actually quite *call* our Saviour Jesus “the *second* Adam,” but clearly that’s how he looks at him. Jesus, for Paul, is a new start for all of humanity—the guy who “always got it *right*,” every single time he faced that same choice between life and death that Adam faced. That, in fact, is what today’s Gospel reading was all about: Jesus facing-down the great Tempter who made *Adam* fall, and turning-aside every single one of those temptations *he* now faced as the Second Adam. Instead of waffling and saying “Sure, Satan, I’ll do whatever you suggest”—Jesus our Saviour clung to the power of God’s Word, every time the Tempter tested him. Unlike the first Adam, *Jesus* stood *strong*, with all of the strength the Holy Spirit gave him. (Matt 4:1-11)

And because Jesus never sinned, you see—neither that day nor any day—Jesus deftly and decisively “undid” all the damage that Adam had caused with *his* sin. And that, in turn, is what set the stage for a *second* “tidal wave” that got rolling at the other end of Jesus’s ministry. The earthquake that opened his tomb on Easter morning was the *cause* of this “second tsunami” that’s been rolling its way all around the world ever since. And it’s a tidal-wave of life, not death, for everyone who puts their hope *in* Jesus! “**If anyone is ‘in Christ’**,” Paul writes in another one of his letters, “**new creation! The old has gone, the new has come.**” (2 Cor 5:17) *Second Adam, new creation!* Get it?

Notice though how adamant Paul is that this second tsunami is not just a mirror-image of the first. The two Adams are not even close to being equal! Instead, the Second Adam surpasses the first, in every way. Paul says this clearly in two ways in this reading:

- First, he says, “**the free gift is not like the trespass**” (v.15);
- And again, “**The free gift cannot be compared with the result of the one man’s sin.**” (v.16)

What Paul is getting at, in both of those comparisons, is both simple and profound. On the one hand, all of this really is pretty simple: God’s gift of life is always greater than Satan’s curse of death. That’s a principle you and I can count on. As Paul puts it, in such a powerful way, a couple chapters later in Romans:

“Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered!’ BUT: in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers; neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:35-39)

Along with that, though,, Paul’s insight is not only simple: it’s also profound. The day will come, Paul says, when death’s destruction will itself be destroyed. It will be swept clean away, so that everything will finally come back to “normal” once again—“normal,” of course, being that awesome kind of “**life-to-the-full**” that none of us children of Adam has ever been able to enjoy

here on earth, since he fell into sin! In Jesus's words: **"I have come so that people may have life—life to the full!"** (John 10:10) Or, as Paul puts it here: **"If, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned... how much more will those who receive the abundance of [God's] grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ."** (v.17)

I can barely imagine what the *fullness* of that new life—that new creation—is going to be like. Can you? We are so used to seeing the tsunami of death swirling all around us, all the time, that we almost start to think of it as *normal*. "Death is just *part of life*," we say—forgetting that *no*, it actually isn't! Death is the *opposite* of life, the *enemy* of life, the *destroyer* of all of the life that God creates. Yes, its reign is "universal—*for now*." But *even now*, its monopoly has been broken by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. As Paul writes in his second letter to Timothy, **"Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light, through the Gospel."** (2 Tim 1:10)

What do you think it will feel like when *life*, not death, comes rolling in over us in all of its glory?—when Christ draws *us* out of the grave and says, **"Come, you who are blessed by my Father: take the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world"?** (Matt 25:34) *Then*, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, **"The saying that has already been written will come to pass: 'Death [itself] will be swallowed up in victory!'"** (1 Cor 15:54, cf Isa 25:8)

May this *hope* that is *rooted* in everything Christ has already done for all of us, as "the second Adam"—this hope that *HE* has already begun to *set straight* everything the first Adam so royally messed up—may this hope bring *you* life!—*now* as you trust in Jesus, and *then* when you see him in glory.

In the name of Jesus we pray this: Amen!