

Ash Wednesday

February 18, 2026

Salutary Gift/ Life-Giving-Fruit Genesis 3:1–15; Revelation 22:1–5, 14; Mark 1:9–13

“In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). This was God’s solemn warning to Adam and Eve. They could eat the fruit from any tree in the Garden of Eden. But not this one. Not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To do so would bring death.

After all, the benefits seemed to outweigh the consequences, at least for the moment. Eve saw that the tree was good for food, it didn’t look dangerous or unpleasant, and she was told it could make her wise.

Adam and Eve would find out the hard way that God was serious when He said, “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” In **Romans 6:23**, the apostle Paul writes: For “the wages of sin is death.”

And death is what they got. For where there is sin, there is also death and damnation.

The age-old problem with mankind is that we have never stopped eating the fruit that leads to death. Every day the scene in the garden gets replayed.

Man sees something that he desires. God says no. Satan taunts, “Did God actually say . . .?” And man says, “Well, maybe just one little bite won’t hurt.”

You, too, know the commandments of God. You know that He requires you to be holy and to live a holy perfect life in thought, word, and deed. And yet, how quickly caution is thrown to the wind. The warnings of God’s Word get ignored when you see something that you want.

You test the limits of His patience. Like a child testing his parents, you see how much you can get away with, just how far you can push the limits before God will inflict punishment upon you.

Not content with what God has given you, not content to stay within the bounds of the Law, you continually try to renegotiate with God.

But this always ends badly. This was how Adam and Eve ended up banished from the tree of life and exiled from the garden. And this is why you must eventually return to dust.

Adam and Eve needed a Savior, and so do you. A Savior from sin and its consequences.

One who would undo the spiritual train wreck left behind in the garden and save you and all people from sin, death, and the devil. One who would open up a way back into paradise and to the tree of life.

It would take one from the woman's seed to do this. It would take the Son of God, assuming your flesh, taking your sin, shame, and your death upon Himself.

It would take Jesus, true God and true Man, drinking the "cup of scorn and dread to crush the ancient serpent's head" Jesus crushed Satan with his death and resurrection bestowing forgiveness, life and salvation to You.

For us, and for our salvation, this new and better Adam said "no" to the devil's temptations. Rather than eat the forbidden fruit of earthly power and glory.

Psalm 102:9 "For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink."

He refused to satisfy Himself, to indulge His appetite, and denied Himself for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness. He was content to live by the Word of His Father—for you.

That is what this Lenten season is all about. Beginning tonight, we return to the garden. We remember with shame the fall of our first parents and the mortal life that we now share with them on account of sin.

We take our place next to Adam and Eve and hear the terrifying voice of the Lord: **"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."**

But we also remember that "no creature could make satisfaction for our sins. Only Christ, true God and man, could do that"

Our only joy, our only comfort in the midst of sin and death is Christ, who bore our sins on the tree of the cross for us, and gave Himself over to His Father's wrath in our stead.

All of this He did so that Adam and his children might live. So that having returned to dust, we might also rise again with Him.

He drank the cup of suffering and tasted death for us all so that we, the fallen sons of Adam, might once again have full and free access to the tree of life.

During this Lenten season, we rejoice that this access is given to us uniquely in the salutary gift of the Lord's Supper.

Now, in sacramental bread and wine, Christians washed in the blood of the Lamb are given to eat another kind of fruit; a life-giving fruit given to us straight from the tree of the cross.

This fruit is none other than the body and blood of our Lord, given and shed on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

And whereas the fruit from the tree of knowledge brought death to Adam, this is truly life-giving fruit. For Christ says in **John 6:58**: "This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

This holy gift, when received in repentance and faith, bestows the very life of Christ and seals to the one who eats of it—the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

The thing about the Sacrament is that it is not impressive to the eyes. Unlike the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was pleasing to the eye, there is nothing extraordinary about the appearance of this fruit.

To our eyes, it seems too ordinary to be worthy of reverence and adoration. But our eyes can deceive us. We can all make the mistake of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5), wishing that God would work His healing in a more spectacular way.

The unbelieving world looks at this gift and asks, "How can something so ordinary, something so unattractive, so unimpressive bestow such gifts?"

The unbelieving world mocks the Christian for trusting so mightily in something that appears so powerless, just as it mocks us for placing our trust in a crucified Savior.

Yet the words of Christ do not lie: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

Tonight, it is fitting that you mourn over your sins. It is fitting that you “rend your hearts and not your garments” and return to the LORD your God in repentance.

You are Adam’s sons and daughters, after all, and you lived as if God did not matter, and as if you mattered most of all.

But you do not mourn without hope. Repent of all your sins.

Joel 2:13: “Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.”

The same God who excommunicated Adam and Eve from the tree of life now welcomes you to His holy Table.

In His mercy; **Joel 2:14: He has left “a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?”**

Dear Christians, in the beginning, God warned Adam concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

But now, in the body and blood of Christ, God has made a solemn promise and pledge to you and to all the faithful: **“In the day that you eat of it you shall surely live.”**
Amen.