

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

There has been a competition going on among fathers and it's all connected to the shirts they wear. One father proudly wears a shirt that says, "World's Best Dad." Not to be outdone, however, another father wears a shirt that says, "World's Greatest Dad." I haven't seen a father yet wearing a shirt that says, "World's Worst Dad." I doubt if it would sell very well. What kid would buy it for his father? Good, better, best--these are the shirts kids want.

God does not play this game of competition. In Genesis 1 He does not have Moses write the words: Day One was great, Day Four was better, but Day Six was best of all. The word He uses is the same throughout all six days of creation. That word is "good." Seven times in Genesis 1 we're told that God saw what He had made and that "it was good." God does not create what is evil. Only good things come from a God who is good.

So mosquitoes were not pests when God made the world. There were no problems with cicadas. No flash floods. No bad weather at all. None of the evils we have today were present when God first made man. It was all good. Forget the "good, better, best" lingo. Everything God made was as good as it could get.

So what happened? Sin happened. Good and evil met at the tree in the middle of the Garden, and with one bite of its fruit evil ruined God's good creation. Now we deal with flooding rivers. Now we spray for bugs and can't wait for the cicadas to go away for thirteen more years. Now we get sick and have to deal with death. Now we live in a dying world infested with sin--the same sin that lives within us. And yet there are times when we say, "I'm having a good day!" or "It doesn't get any better than this!"

But what is a good day for us? It's not the same as when God said in the beginning: That was a good day! For us a good day is when we avoid much of the evil in this world; when we avoid tears and sadness, pain and suffering. But no day here is as good as it gets, because each and every day we sin against our neighbor and against our God. We disobey His commands. Each and every day we fail to do the good things God requires us to do. Each and every day death is closing in on us. We are all dying, some slowly, some quickly, even on those days which we think are really pretty good.

"Pastor, this is all very depressing," you may be thinking. We're taught to think in positive terms, to make the most out of every circumstance. But is this not what Jesus did? When His disciples were exclaiming how magnificent the temple buildings looked, He did not join in with, "They are beautiful, aren't they?" He said, "Not one stone will be left upon another. They will all be destroyed." When Peter confessed to Jesus that he would never fall away, Jesus did not cheer him on. He said, "You will deny Me three times." Often in His ministry Jesus spoke one depressing thing after another. And perhaps this is because people everywhere, and even Christians, look for good apart from God...when the truth is that nothing apart from God is good.

Two brothers sitting in a boat fishing on a beautiful Sunday morning tell each other, "This is as good as it gets!" But we know better. To be where Christ is for us in His Word and Sacraments is as good as it gets. "He who is not with Me," says Jesus, "is against Me." Many Civil War soldiers were believed to have died a good death, even though they were not Christian, as long as they died with dignity. But apart from God no one dies a good death. Apart from God nothing, in life or in death, is good.

Now it's true that the Bible says God is good to all whether they believe in Him or not. He gives sunshine and rain to the righteous and to the wicked. Yet to live apart from the Lord, even God's good gifts are more of a curse than a blessing. A lush green golf course is a good blessing to those who use it rightly. But it's a curse to the man who is always there when he could be in church, for it is being used by Satan to keep him steadfast in his unbelief. Even the tree God planted in the middle of the Garden was good, for He made nothing that was evil. But Satan used it for evil by luring Adam and Eve to its fruit.

After sin came into the world, after Genesis 1, after evil ruined God's good creation, is there anything good left for us? Yes there is, and our second reading for today brings it out clearly. If you have your insert out, do you see it there in Acts 2? The words of St. Peter to the crowd in Jerusalem in verse 23, "This Jesus...you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." That's good?...the brutal murder of Jesus? Yes, it's why we call the day of His death Good Friday. In fact, after everything that was so good in Genesis 1 was ruined by sin and wickedness, the only good thing left was God's promise of the cross. Satan ruined all those "good days." All seven of God's "it was good," he ruined one after another. They were all struck down at the tree in the middle of the Garden. And so God raised up another tree; a tree that Satan could not ruin, could not overcome. God raised up His Son on the tree of Calvary. And because of that tree, my friends, every good thing of God is restored to you.

But not yet fully. Now we see only a reflection of paradise--a reflection which shines off the water in the baptismal font, a reflection which shines off the cup of your Savior's blood. "Now we see in a mirror dimly," but in heaven we will see our good God face-to-face. In heaven every day will be good. In heaven the pesky mosquitoes and the floods will be gone. In heaven there will be no more sin, no more pain, tears, or death. In heaven everything will be good. But now, now for us we keep our eyes focused on the one good thing--the cross of Jesus.

Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree which brought evil into the world, and so today God bids you to eat the fruit of the tree of Life. The fruits of Jesus' tree--the tree upon which He hung--are here for you to eat and drink in His Sacrament. The fruit of the first tree brought evil, but the fruit of the cross restores for you the good things of God, for the fruits of the cross are forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Because of the cross, life for you is good. You can take the ups and the downs, the joys and the sorrows, because paradise is yours through Jesus Christ. Because of the cross, everything for you is good, even though we are weak and sinful, for your good and gracious God forgives you. No matter what kind of person you have been...whether you could wear a shirt that says, "World's Worst Dad," or "World's Worst Son or Daughter," or perhaps join in with St. Paul in wearing the words, "I Am the Chief of Sinners," you have a merciful God. On a day that was good for you and me, His Son died for you.

And so even if you think there is nothing good for you, nothing good in your life, look at the tree of Calvary. Your Heavenly Father did. And as He saw His Son dying for you, as He saw His blood being shed for your sins, as He heard His Son praying, "Father, forgive them," God "saw that it was good." And now you are forgiven. You have a Savior. And He gives you a world that is good beyond our wildest dreams. A good and perfect world that Satan can never ruin. A world which is yours now, which is coming to you in the end--heaven's perfect paradise for you in Christ Jesus. Amen.