### Romans 5:12-21

**12**Therefore, 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—

**13**To 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. **14**Nevertheless, 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.

**15**But 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! **16**Nor can the 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.**17**For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

**18**Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. **19**For 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.

**20**The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, **21**so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Matthew 4:1-11

**4**Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2**After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3**The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

**4**Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

**5**Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. **6**“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“‘He will command his angels concerning you,  
    and they will lift you up in their hands,  
    so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

**7**Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

**8**Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **9**“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

**10**Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

**11**Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

“Teeter Totter”

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What a mouthful that passage from Romans is, isn’t it? Before moving to anything else, I want to share a brief passage from Ann Jervis of Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto, in which I think she clears up some of the befuddlement. “It is not simply that Christ cancelled out Adam’s mistake. It is that Christ *more than*made up for Adam’s trespass; Christ outdid himself, Christ made up exceedingly when perhaps God through Christ could simply have reversed Adam’s mistake in a legalistic, accountant kind of way. The free gift operates in a different arena than the audit room, the court room. The free gift operates in the arena of love.”

I want to have you picture something this morning that may help you to understand just how powerful is God’s gift of Grace. Picture for yourselves a school playground—one that hasn’t yet been rid of all the equipment that would later be deemed dangerous. I wonder how many of you have played on a see-saw (which I mistakenly called a teeter totter in titling this morning’s message). You might imagine sin and grace, like a see-saw, but so much more heavily weighted on the side of grace. It’s like the game where you never let the other person come down. In a reverse version of the game, in which rather than taunting us with keeping us in the air against our will, God is our willing playmate of sorts. We might think about the pivot point of the seesaw being a kind of swing on the axis of our behavior, and that might well be true if we were bound by obedience to law. But we’re not. We pivot on our faith in Jesus Christ, through whom we receive the free gift of grace; of forgiveness and love. We also are invited to respond to others with this same gift.

In all Paul’s talk about Adam and Jesus, we may forget just how great a gift we are talking about, here. I’m pretty sure I shared with you before a brief quotation from one of my favorite childhood authors was Madeleine L’Engle, who might be best known for her Time Quartet of novels, beginning with *A Wrinkle in Time*. I recently reread the following quotation, which I think may help us to bit more about the gift we have in Christ. She writes, “It’s a good thing to have all the props pulled out from under us occasionally. It gives us some sense of what is rock under our feet, and what is sand.”

I do wonder sometimes what will make us understand just how much God loves us and wants for us. Other times, I don’t wonder at all. Have you ever had all the props pulled out? I would venture to say that I know you have. And God knows it, too. God has always known our difficulties—the ones we create through our decisions and the ones that happen upon us by virtue of our humanity. And do you know what? God understands them, too, because God became one of us—in order to understand, and in order to save us from sin and death.

Yes, Jesus knows what it is to be human; to have all the props pulled out from under him, and to know the rock under his feet that was his faith and the Word of God in scripture. Jesus was tested and tempted in a wilderness we know to be desert sand and devilish allure. I know that in my reading of this passage, I have often focused more on the objects of temptation that the devil places in Jesus’ path than on the reasons that Jesus chooses not to fall. For our purposes today, we might think of these temptations as the sand on which we too often rest. We think somehow that we can rely on ourselves for our sustenance, as expressed in living by bread alone. The foundation of rock on which we are truly nourished, though, is to know that we are never alone; that God walks with us and provides for us. Jesus knew it, having been raised in the Word that told him so, and trusting in this truth so much that he didn’t give into temptation.

Through the history of Christianity, part of the journey of Lent has involved more conscious focus on this Word, this scripture, and on prayer and giving, which we are practicing this season by bringing gifts to share. I know that I wish I could be more like Jesus, resting comfortably, confidently on God when the difficulties of life assail. As traditional a part of the Christian faith journey as giving has been engaging those practices that help to remove any borders between us and God. Holding as a model of faith and faithfulness Jesus’ own actions and inclinations, I want to be more like Jesus. So, during this season of Lent, I invite you to join me on Wednesday mornings at 9:00 to practice *lectio divina* with me. Wanting to make of scripture the smooth stones on which we may rely for comfort and for guidance, we will rest with different texts each week with the four-part entry into the Word that has guided Christians for hundreds of years. As another favorite early saint, John of the Cross taught it, “Seek in *reading* and you will find in *meditation*; knock in *prayer* and it will be opened to you in *contemplation*.”

Maybe we will take as our first passage the story of Jesus’ temptation that we read on this first Sunday of Lent. Jesus knows that God will protect him; that there are indeed angels who will and do raise him up. Jesus is *so certain* of this that rather than prove it to a beguiling tempter, he responds with the equally certain truth that he will not test his Father’s power. He will, rather, trust that power. Scripture has told him so, and for us, scripture has now borne it out. And Jesus, look at the glory you might have, if you will only worship me, says Satan! Oh, Lisa, oh George, oh Gale or Paul or any one of us here, look at the glory if you will only worship me, says Satan—worship me by putting before God the idols of instant gratification and temporal satisfaction. That glory, though, is as instantly gone and eternally dead as the sin that offers it. And Jesus knows this, because Jesus has been offered it, too.

We climb onto the seesaw, expecting to have to struggle to balance ourselves to remain level; to muddle our way through the joys and also the difficulties of life, and we are told lifelong that what we fight against is death. Jesus knew that this is true. God knows that this is true, but God also offers us a way out. Where sin came into the world through one man, helping us to know our tendency *not* to welcome God’s walking beside us and providing all we need, Jesus saves. God knows what it is to die in sin, and God wants us to reign in life. We do this through the one man, Jesus, who has more than balanced the seesaw for us. God offers us the free gift of forgiveness and the glory of eternal life with Christ. We need only accept the gift, extended over and over again, no matter how often we hit bottom.

Our sin could have us perpetually on the down side. Life’s circumstances of discouragement could have us down, but in Christ—through faith in Christ, we are raised up. We *remain* up, no matter what we do, when we believe in Christ. We are rescued from the death that came through the one man, Adam—or as we might understand it, in being born into the sin of this world; separated from God through choices we also make, we die. In Christ, we are justified by our faith and, so, live. I would like to close with a lovely poem by Annie Johnson Flint, by way of a prayer.

[God] giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;  
[God] sendeth more strength when the labors increase.  
To added affliction he addeth his mercy;  
To multiplied trials, he multiplies peace.  
His love has no limit, his grace has no measure;  
His power has no boundary known unto men.  
For out of his infinite riches in Jesus,  
God giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.