

The Green Hill Presbyterian Church
Sunday, February 22, 2026 – Table Copy

SILENT PREPARATION

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts! See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (*Unison*)

Life-sustaining God, with us through all our trials and temptations: Bear us up through this season of self-examination, that we might feed on the bread of your Word, open ourselves to your presence – without demanding proof and signs – and let go of all the idols that surround us. May we worship and serve you with joy and delight, in uprightness of heart, through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (*Unison*)

Holy God, we confess our transgressions before you. We want life to revolve around us, and we resist limits on our freedom – in order to follow the impulses of the moment. Like a horse or a mule, we resent the bit and bridle that make us useful participants in the community you seek to create. Rather, we want other people to fit into the patterns that serve us best. And, when we try to live apart from you, we sense that something is missing from our lives. Please walk with us – both in this season, and beyond – and help us to become all that we were created to be....

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Eternal and ever-living God,
who enabled our Lord Jesus Christ to withstand the assaults
of the evil one through the armor of your Holy Word:
Strengthen us this day – through the reading and hearing of Holy Scripture –
that we, too, may prevail against all the tests and temptations of our day,
and – following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ –
live to the glory of your holy name.

Amen.

FIRST READING:

Romans 5:12-21

Our first reading comes from the Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

In the verses just before our reading,

Paul has been stressing reliance on what God has done in Jesus Christ....

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man,
and death came through sin,
and so death spread to all because all have sinned –
for sin was indeed in the world before the law,
but sin is not reckoned when there is no law.

Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses,
even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam,
who is a pattern of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass.
For if the many died through the one man's trespass,
much more surely have the grace of God –
and the gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ –
abounded for the many.

And the gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin.
For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation,
but the gift following many trespasses brings justification.

If, because of the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one,
much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace –
and the gift of righteousness –
reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all,
so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.

For just as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners,
so through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

But law came in, so that the trespass might increase,
but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,
so that, just as sin reigned in death,
so grace might also reign through justification –
leading to eternal life – through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SECOND READING: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7, 22-24

*In our reading from Genesis – the book of beginnings –
we find the ancient account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.
And, we learn of their crucial decision –
a decision which changed the course of human history...*

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden –
to till it, and keep it.

And the LORD God commanded the man,
“You may freely eat of every tree of the garden,
but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil –
you shall not eat,
for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal
that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman,

“Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

The woman said to the serpent,

“We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,
but God said,

‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree –
that is in the middle of the garden,
nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’ ”

But the serpent said to the woman,

“You will not die, for God knows that – when you eat of it –
your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God –
knowing good and evil.”

So – when the woman saw that the tree was good for food –
and that it was a delight to the eyes –

and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise –
she took of its fruit and ate,

and she also gave some to her husband – who was with her,
and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened,

and they knew that they were naked –

and they sewed fig leaves together –

and made loincloths for themselves.

Then the LORD God said,

“See, the humans have become like one of us – knowing good and evil –
and now they might reach out their hands –
and take also from the tree of life –
and eat – and live forever.”

Therefore, the LORD God sent them forth from the garden of Eden –
to till the ground – from which they were taken.

He drove out the humans, and –

at the east of the garden of Eden –

he placed the cherubim – and a sword flaming, and turning –
to guard the way to the tree of life.

SERMON

“Life East of Eden: Getting Back to the Garden”

A woman tells of joining a *weight-loss organization*.

At one meeting, the instructor held up an apple – and a candy bar.

“What are the attributes of this apple,” she asked,
“and how do they relate to our diet?”

Among the answers that came from the group:

“Low in calories” and *“lots of fiber.”*

The instructor then detailed what was wrong with eating candy;
and – she concluded –

“Apples are not only more healthful, but also less expensive.

Do you know I paid seventy-five cents for this candy bar?”

The group stared intently as she held aloft the *forbidden treat*.

And – from the back of the room – a *small voice* was heard:

“I’ll give you a dollar for it.”

That’s *human nature* – is it not?

To prefer the candy bar to the apple?

Of course – some would say –

it was the apple that *got us in trouble* in the first place.

And that – of course – is one of the world’s *best-known stories*.

Everything in the **Garden of Eden** was beautiful – and good.

Indeed, **Adam** and **Eve** were forbidden *only one thing*:

There was a *particular tree* in the center of the garden –
the **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**.

The scriptures do not say it was an apple tree –

or any other kind of known tree –

but it doesn’t hurt to visualize the forbidden fruit
as a big, juicy, **Golden Delicious**.

And – **God** had told **Adam** –
he could eat the fruit of *any tree* in the garden...*except* that one.

Of course, we know what people are like.

Mark Twain once said that God’s mistake
was not making the *snake forbidden* –
then, Adam would have *eaten it*.

In any event, one day **Eve** is there in the garden –
and the *serpent* is there, too..

And after some conversation – and at the urging of the serpent –
she ends up *taking a bite*.

Then – to compound the error – she *gives some* to Adam, as well.

And so – since *time immemorial* –
some have blamed Eve for leading Adam into sin.

But, we must *note the details* of the story:

*“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree
was good for food and a delight to the eye,
and also to be desired to make one wise,
she took of its fruit and ate.*

*“She also gave some to her husband,
who was with her,
and he ate.”*

(Gen. 3:6, emphasis added)

So, **Adam** *was with Eve* when she ate the forbidden fruit.

But, we must also bear in mind that **Eve** *was not* present –
when **God** told **Adam** *not to eat* the fruit
of the **Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil**.

And yet – when the *serpent tempts Eve* – **Adam** *does not* speak up.

And, **Eve's** reply – "*nor shall you touch it...*" – to the serpent's *first question* – indicates that **Adam** was the first person to "*build a fence around the law*"; that is, to make **God's actual commandment** – unnecessarily – *more stringent*.

Thus, **Adam** *had not* been content to tell **Eve** *only* what **God** had *actually said*.

But – as the infomercials say – "*That's not all!*"

Adam not only *remains silent*;
but he – *then* – *watches Eve* as she takes the forbidden fruit – and eats it.

Remember that **God** had said that they *would die* –
as a consequence of eating the forbidden fruit.

Note that it is only after **Adam** sees – that **Eve** is *still alive* –
that he *takes the fruit from her*, and *eats it himself*.

So – instead of loving his wife –
Adam effectively *uses her as a guinea pig* to test **God's command**.

Note also that – when **God** confronts **Adam** about his misdeed –
Adam tries to *put the blame on Eve*. *Recall the First Trial....*

But – back to the Scripture: **God** – of course – *knows better*.

They *both* violated **God's command**,
and – so – they *both* must pay.

Writing about the *first couple's sin*,
Nancy Leigh DeMoss had this to say:
"When we *find something we like* at the store,
one of the first things we do is *look at the price tag....*

Wouldn't it be nice....
if we understood the cost of sin right up front?

If the forbidden fruit had been *rotten* – and *crawling with worms* –
do you think **Eve** would have eaten any?

But – as **Genesis** tells us – ,

*‘When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree
was good for food, and pleasing to the eye,
and also desirable for gaining wisdom,
she took some and ate it.’*

Eve acted on her *immediate desires* –
without looking at the price tag.”

That’s an error that *many people* end up making

Would any young person experiment with drugs – or alcohol –
if they could see where the journey would end?

Would any spouse be unfaithful – to his or her mate –
if all the heartache and pain were evident up front?

In *any event*, **Adam** and **Eve** ate of the forbidden fruit.

And, *this misdeed* resulted in a number of **consequences**,
the **first of which** was the loss of innocence.

The **Scripture** tells us the eyes of both of them were opened,
and they knew that they were naked.

So, they *sewed fig leaves together* – and made themselves loincloths.

Hence – **Joey Adams** has quipped –

“They argued over who would *wear the plants* in the family.”

Returning to the story, the previously-innocent **Adam** and **Eve**
discovered what it means to be *naked*.

And – *with the loss of innocence* – came a **loss of intimacy**.

Nothing would ever be the same for *this couple*,
and – subsequently – nothing would ever be the same for *all humanity*.

We simply *cannot overemphasize* the broken-ness
that came into human relations from that day forward –
particularly with regard to family life.

Consider – for example – *relationships between siblings*....
in the book of **Genesis** alone:

Cain versus **Abel**,
Isaac versus **Ishmael**,
Esau versus **Jacob**,
His brothers versus **Joseph**.

Every one of these stories is a *disaster*!

In this fallen world,

people are *often estranged* from one another:
husbands are estranged from their wives....,
parents are estranged from their children....,
neighbors are estranged from neighbors....

That's the *way things are* –
the *cost of the loss* of innocence and intimacy – *to humankind* –
simply *cannot be exaggerated*.

So, ignoring **God's command** *changes everything* –
even the *serpent is caught up* in the aftermath:

God decrees that it will *crawl on its belly* –
and *eat dust* –
all the days of its life.

Adam and Eve – of course – will *pay for their crimes*, as well.

To **Eve**, **God** says,

“I will greatly *increase your pains* in childbearing;
with pain you will *give birth* to children.

Your desire will be for your husband,
and *he will rule* over you.”

So – we might ask –

are *these truly curses* which **God** placed upon the woman,
or are these *merely a description*
of *how life will be* in a fallen world?

For example, suppose **modern science**
were to *eliminate all pain* in childbirth.

Would *that mean* that we have eliminated **God’s curse**?

But certainly – on the other hand –
much of the world *lives without* the benefits of modern science....

And how about women’s *subjection to men*?

Is that a *curse* – or is it *simply a description* –
of the way things are in a *fallen world*?

Actually, this **second question** is *now academic* –
in **Christ**, **God** has *removed the curse* from **Eve**,
as well as from *all humanity*:

As **Paul** – *not* generally regarded as a *feminist* –
writes in **Galatians 3:28**,

“*There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male or female,
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*”

And – to **Adam** – **God** says,

“*Cursed is the ground* because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it –
all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

By the *sweat of your brow* you will eat your food....
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for *dust you are* and to *dust* you will return.”

Notice that it is *not the man* who is cursed, but the *ground*.

Man already had been given dominion over the garden –
he was already responsible for its upkeep.

But – now – it will *no longer be a joy* to maintain.

The **loss of intimacy** – then – not only extended to **Eve**,
but *even to the earth* from which **Adam** had come.

Now, *life* would be “**toil**.”

Interestingly, the word used for *toil* in **Hebrew**
is the *same word* as that used for the *pain*
that the *woman will experience* in childbearing.

And – again – is this a *curse* – or a *description*?

Certainly, many men love their work – as do many women.

And, other things may *seem much more* like the pain of childbirth
than does *going to the office* each day.

(Then again, that may depend upon who you work for – or with.)

But there is a **fourth punishment** –
the *most significant* of them all –
which is *visited on both Adam and Eve*:
They are *banished* from the **Garden of Eden**.

“...the **LORD God** *sent him forth* from the **Garden of Eden**,
to *till the ground* from which he was taken.

He drove out the man;
and *at the east* of the **Garden of Eden** he placed the *cherubim*,
and a *sword flaming – and turning –*
to *guard the way* to the **Tree of Life**.” (Gen. 3:24)

And *that is where many people still live* today;
East of Eden,
in a *state of broken-ness*, estrangement, and shame.

To be sure, *none of this* was **God’s original intent**.

God created humankind for *voluntary fellowship* –
and *humankind chose* to go their own way;
to *eat the fruit* of the forbidden tree.

So, we *cannot blame God*:
for broken homes...,
broken bodies.....,
broken neighborhoods....
or a broken world.....

These are all the *fruits of humanity* expressing its *free will*.

So, *why* – then – *did* Adam and Eve disobey God?

Well, *why do you and I* disobey God?

There’s *something within us* –
a remnant of *unregenerated human nature* –
that is *in rebellion*.

“Well,” somebody says, “*The devil made me do it.*”

Wrong answer – unless you are Flip Wilson’s “Geraldine.”

Remember that time-honored routine.

Geraldine’s husband asks,
“Why did you buy the *new dress?*”

“Well, honey, the *devil made me do it.*”

“Didn’t you say,
‘*Get thee behind me Satan?*’”

“Yeah, but he said it *looked good in back*, too.”

That’s *not* good theology.

Throughout scripture,
we see that the devil does *only one thing* – he tempts.

You and I – then – *make the choice:*
whether to give in – or not.

You and I are *solely responsible* for our own actions.

A *better* – or at least, *more interesting* – question is this:
Did **God** *know* that Adam and Eve would sin?

And the answer – of course – would *have to be yes*, **God** knew.

God gives us freedom, but **God** knows our hearts.

If **God** *did not* give us freedom –
and *allow us to experience* the consequences of that freedom –
we would *remain spiritual infants*.

Freedom – and **failure** – then –
seem to be essential to emotional and spiritual growth.

Earlier in **Romans 5** – *before* today’s reading –
we find the *best explanation* for why **God** created a world
in which the *possibility of sin* exists:

Paul says that
“suffering produces endurance...,
and endurance produces character...,
and character produces hope...,
and hope does not disappoint us...”

(Romans 5:3-5)

In other words, **God** wants to *build people of character*,
people *suitable to inhabit eternity* with **God**,
and *that is why God* gives us *freedom* –
even the *freedom to disobey*.

It is significant that **God** put an *angel with a flaming sword*
at the entrance to the **Garden of Eden**.

This is the **Bible’s** way of saying that *never again* – in this age –
will people live in a *perfect paradise*.

Never again – until **Christ returns** –
will people live in *perfect innocence and intimacy*.

Humanity *had* its chance....but we *blew it*.

But – thankfully – *there is* hope;
that is what the **Gospel** is all about.

There are – actually – **three gardens** of note in **Scripture**.

One – of course – is **Eden**, where *humanity* first cried out,
“*Not your will, but mine be done.*”

**The second is Gethsemane, where a lonely figure cries out,
“Not my will, but thine be done.”**

Later – on a hill nearby – **Jesus hangs on a cross.**

And – like the original **Adam** – he is *naked*.

But, he *is not* ashamed.

He is suffering *on our behalf* – so that the *curse of death* may be removed.

In this morning’s reading from **Romans, Paul** put it like this:

“If, because of the *one man’s trespass*,
death exercised dominion *through that one*,
much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace
and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life
through the *one man*, **Jesus Christ**.

“Therefore just as *one man’s trespass* led to condemnation for all,
so *one man’s act of righteousness* leads to justification
and life for all.

“For just as by the *one man’s disobedience* the many were made sinners,
so by the *one man’s obedience* the many will be made righteous.

In other words, *through one man* – **Adam** – *sin* entered the world.

However, through *another solitary individual* – **Jesus of Nazareth** –
came victory over sin and death.

Jesus faced the tempter in the wilderness and *did not sin*.

But – on the cross – he *gave himself as a sin offering* for us all.

The final garden of importance to us is *at the end* of the **Bible** –
in the *very last chapter* of **Revelation**:

(22:1-3)

“Then the angel showed me the *river of the water of life*,
as clear as crystal,
flowing from the **throne of God** and of the **Lamb**
through the down the middle of the street of the city.

“On either side of the river is the **tree of life**,
with its *twelve kinds of fruit*,
producing its fruit each month.
And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

“Nothing accursed will there be anymore.
But the **throne of God** and of the **Lamb** will be in it,
and his servants will worship him...”

Friends, in **Christ**, the *curse of death* has been removed.

Christ has *made it possible* for innocence – and intimacy – to be restored.

And, the **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil** will – one day –
be transformed into the **Tree of Life**.

That is our hope.

This broken world *is not* **God’s final word** –
because *one man kneeled* in a garden – and prayed,
“Not my will, but thine be done.”

Then, he *allowed himself to be sacrificed* upon a cruel cross.

But – because of that *one man’s obedience* –
sin and death *no longer have dominion* over us.

And we – *who live east of Eden* –
are now *invited back to the garden* – in **Jesus Christ!**

Thanks be to God! Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)

In the beginning, man was made according to the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, good and upright. But when at the instigation of the serpent, and by his own fault he abandoned goodness and righteousness, he became subject to sin, death and various calamities. And what he became by the fall, that is, subject to sin, death and various calamities, so are all those who have descended from him.

By sin, we understand that innate corruption of man which has been derived or propagated in us all from our first parents, by which we, immersed in perverse desires and averse to all good, are included to all evil. Full of all wickedness, distrust, contempt and hatred of God, we are unable to do or even to think of anything good of ourselves. For this reason, by our own deserts being subject to the wrath of God, we are liable to just punishment, so that all of us would have been cast away by God, if Christ, the Deliverer, had not brought us back. Amen.

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

In the beginning, the first couple – by their disobedience –
in yielding to temptation –
chose to live east of Eden.

Now it is our opportunity – as we respond to God's grace in Jesus Christ –
whether – or not – we will get back to the Garden.

Let us receive the Lord's benediction...