

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Midweek Advent 1

December 2, 2020

Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

***Emmanuel: God with us in sinless perfection***

—Revelation 21:3-5

When you think of Adam and Eve, our first parents in the Garden of Eden, what image comes to mind? Maybe you imagine two very nice, innocent, naïve, human beings walking around in the garden. It's very common today to think of our ancestors of ancient times as knuckle-dragging primates communicating with grunts and gestures, perhaps just one notch above the chimpanzees. I invite you to rethink whatever notion you might have had about this man and this woman. Picture people who were intellectually brilliant, with brains and minds, mental acuity, that functioned at the very highest level. Their thinking, their reason, their intellect was in perfect synchrony with the mind of God; they were, after all, created in God's image. Their thoughts, their intentions, their morals, their reason, their will, were in perfect harmony with the Maker of the Universe. Picture people of perfect physique, with perfectly sculpted bodies. They were perfectly genetically pure. Their DNA was uncorrupted; their cells had no genetic mutations. Each of them was the perfect prototype of the male and the female of the human species.

When God finished his creation and saw all he had made he pronounced it very good. Try and grasp the meaning of that declaration. The God who is himself holy and perfect in every way declared his whole creation to be the same. Beautiful. Pristine. Orderly. A creation for God to delight in. A brilliant masterpiece. God placed this man and this woman into the position of exercising dominion over all his masterpiece. He made them the crown and the jewel and the glory of all his creation. In that world God himself walked. He made his presence known to his creation as he walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. Our first parents basked in his love. They wanted for nothing. They lacked nothing. They talked with God. They were in perfect communion with God. In that paradise called Eden there was divine perfection, divine peace, divine ecstasy, perfect balance, perfect harmony.

In our midweek Advent series this year we reflect on the word "Emmanuel." The word means "God with us." We think about the different ways that God has been with us, is with us, and will be with us, and what it means to have God at our side with us. Tonight we ponder paradise, Emmanuel, God with us in sinless perfection. What is it like to have God right with us, right at our side, to walk and to talk with us? To understand Emmanuel in this way we have to go back to the beginning of time, when the world was young, when the whole creation was in harmony with God, to the time before paradise was lost. Then we can look ahead to the end of time, when paradise will be restored.

We know what happened to turn a sinless paradise into the sinful world we live in today. There was one thing absent in the perfect minds of Adam and Eve: they lacked the knowledge of evil. Satan, the deceiver, tempted them with the proposition of being like God, knowing good and evil. Eve, desiring to gain knowledge tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree. She and her husband discovered the meaning of evil; their eyes were opened. Naked and afraid they ran from the voice of their loving Maker. Now instead of reveling in the presence of Emmanuel, God with us in sinless paradise, they tried to make themselves far from God and keep God far from them. They were ejected from the garden and condemned to labor and toil by the sweat of their brow, to endure hardship and pain, in a world that is no longer a paradise. It took 930 years, but that perfectly sculpted, beautifully created body of Adam aged and succumbed to death, and it returned to the dust from which it had been formed by the loving hand of its Maker nearly 1,000 years before. When God made Adam he breathed into him the breath of life. Because of Adam's sin, God demanded his breath, and Adam yielded his spirit as the wages of disobedience.

It wasn't just Adam and Eve and their descendants who fell under a death sentence. All creation became subject to bondage and decay. In paradise lost everything ages. Everything wears out. Every living thing dies. This creation is no longer a perfect paradise but a place of violence and destruction. In Romans 8 Scripture reminds us that the creation itself is waiting to be liberated from its bondage to decay and restored to sinless perfection.

But restoring paradise was no small task. The original paradise was perfect because it was made by a perfect Creator. When paradise was lost it took more than just God's creating power to restore what had fallen. The human race needed a Redeemer. Restoration required satisfaction of perfect justice. The curse of sin that results in decay and death had to be removed. Paradise restored would come at a cost—infinite cost. The blood of God's Son had to be shed as the innocent substitute and perfect sacrifice for a world of sinners. Only with Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection victory could sin be atoned for, justice satisfied, and paradise restored. That's the whole reason Jesus of Nazareth came, preached, taught, lived, died and rose. That was the whole purpose of

Jesus' incarnation, life, death and resurrection—everything that Jesus suffered and endured. It was to reconcile God and mankind with his own blood, to remake everything new and perfect, to restore paradise.

Jesus did die for the sin of the world. Jesus did rise for your redemption and justification. Your sins are forgiven by Jesus' blood that was shed for you! Now we look forward again to being with God in sinless perfection. In his Revelation, St. John saw what this will look like: <sup>3</sup>*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

When you think about being in heaven, what do you find most appealing? For a man named Asaph who wrote Psalm 73, the answer was simple. The beauty of heaven is this: God is there! "Whom have I in heaven but you, and earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (v. 25, 26). We will see the beauty of God's majestic glory. *God will be with them and be their God.* We will bask in his love in perfect bliss, perfect rest. We will experience what Adam and Eve experienced in paradise: divine ecstasy, perfect harmony.

In this brief earthly life we experience many wonderful, beautiful things that fill our hearts with joy and comfort and peace. Unfortunately, everything we experience here is somehow marred and messed up by sin. Here we enjoy delicious food, but it gives us indigestion or raises our cholesterol or makes us put on weight. We enjoy beautiful views and scenic panoramas, but we get winded and tired climbing toward that mountaintop experience. We enjoy love and companionship and cherish the company of friends and family and people who are dear to us, but our relationships are also harmed by misunderstanding and conflict and sadness and deception and disappointment and betrayal. We aspire to do and achieve, but our accomplishments are tarnished by imperfection, and our achievements are diminished by the fact that they won't last. Our talents fade. Our bodies return to dust. Our contributions and accomplishments are forgotten.

In heaven that all changes. We won't just stand around in heaven doing nothing. We're not just going to be disembodied spirits floating around in the clouds. We believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. We will really be alive with God in a perfectly restored paradise. We will eat and drink. We will celebrate massively. We will love and be loved. We will accomplish and achieve, with brilliant minds and ever-expanding talents. We will experience none of the bad, only the good, only the perfect, all the time.

<sup>5</sup>*He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."* We are looking forward to being with our God together in sinless perfection. We are looking forward to paradise restored in heaven. We have his promise, which is trustworthy and true. So why do we hold on so tightly here in this life? It is because God created us to live, not die, and the physical death through which we must pass before we see God is not natural; it is a gloomy portal through which we must pass to enter eternity. We hold on so tightly here because as dark and fallen as this world is, this is what we know. But what God has planned for us is so much better. It transcends our comprehension, even the capacity of our imagination. It is greater, better, more wonderful, than we can ever possibly conceive. And it's all waiting for us in eternity. Emmanuel: God with us in sinless perfection forever. Amen.