

\*\*\*\*\*

<sup>12</sup> Sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.

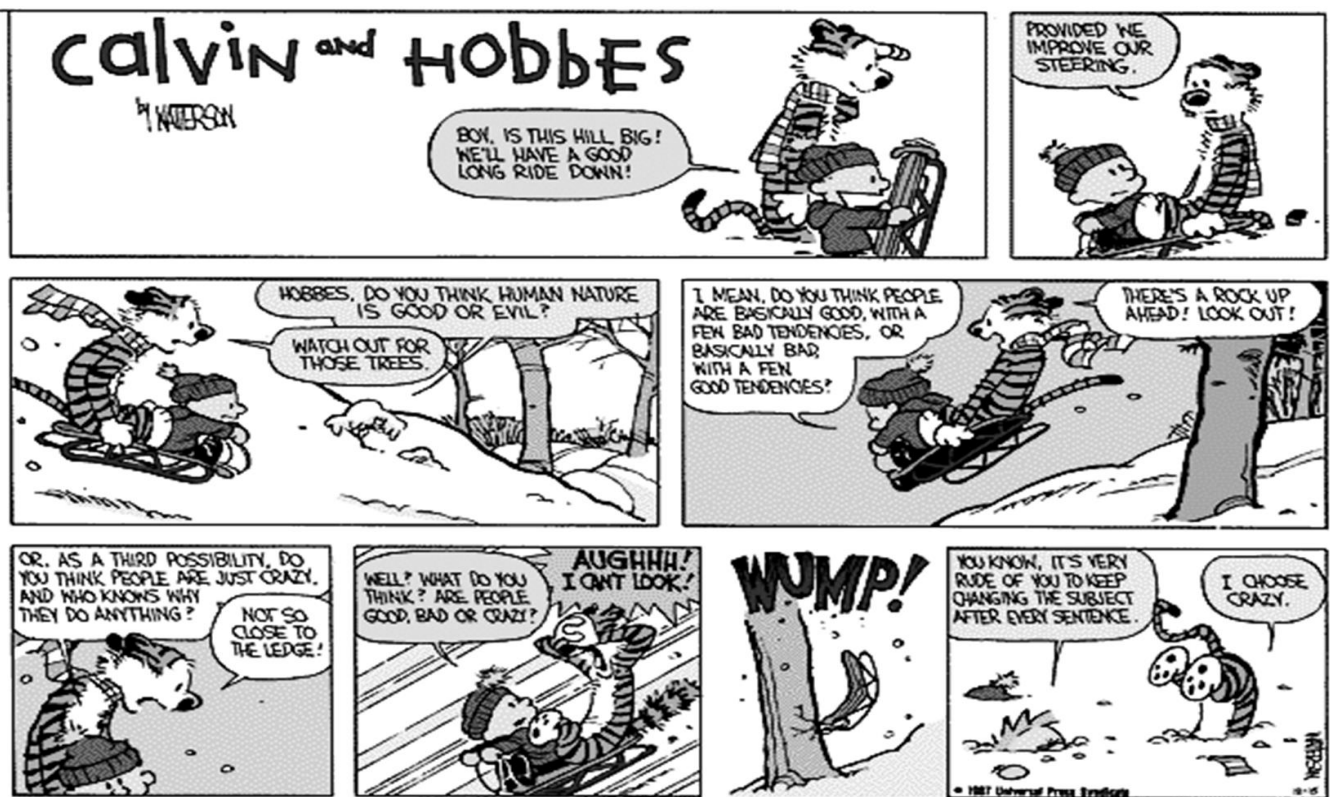
<sup>15</sup> But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

From Romans 5

\*\*\*\*\*

The great philosophers, Calvin and Hobbes, have once asked the question, "Is human nature essentially 'good' or 'bad'?"



This is a profound little cartoon. At its heart is a question of the origins of 'evil' as we look at the world today. Is human nature essentially good, with a few bad tendencies – or are we basically bad with a few good tendencies? And where does all the 'crazy' come from?

Today in the Scripture we hear the account of 'The Fall of Humankind' – both from Genesis 3, and Romans 5. In Genesis 3 (vv.6-7) we read, "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. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."

In Romans 5 (v.12) we read, “Sin came into the world through one man, and his sin brought death with it. As a result, death has spread to the whole human race because everyone has sinned.”

The Bible teaches we do what we do because we ‘inherit’ our ‘sinful nature’ from our parents. Psalm 51:5 says, “Surely I was sinful at birth; sinful from the time my mother *conceived* me.” You are a sinner. The Apostle Paul says (Romans 5:12): “Sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.” You are a sinner, and one day you **will** die.

Some may respond, then, to this, “This is not fair. I had no hope in the first place.” But we can respond to this in one of two ways. First, do you wish you had never been born? (Actually, more than one person in the Bible has said this. eg: Job, Jeremiah). The other, more important way, of responding is by saying that you still have a choice when it comes to sin. Don’t you?

As we step into this holy season of Lent we are acknowledging there is something ‘wrong’ and ‘broken’ in all creation (First Reading: Genesis 2 & 3), and we are called to acknowledge this and confront this (cf. Gospel: Matt.4). We see that in international events in human history. We see this in the pain and suffering we experience in the realm of human relationships (and the pain and suffering we inflict upon others, either knowingly or unknowingly). We see this in the terrible, sad, and tragic events that happen all around us. Sin is at work in the world. Death is at work in the world. And no one is spared from this, not even you...

In our reading for today the Apostle Paul speaks of ‘the how’ that ‘sin’ and ‘death’ entered the world. Earlier in Romans (Chapters 1 to 3) Paul highlight that every one is a sinner – with absolutely no exceptions. Indeed, Paul says, those who claim to be ‘righteous’ are left with no excuse because, if they say they know God’s law, they should be ‘better’. And even the smallest of ‘sin’ on their ‘scale’ highlights that sin does truly live within.

Then, in chapters 3 to 4, Paul speaks about how we are ‘made right with God’ through Christ, and this ‘righteousness’ comes by faith (and Paul uses Abraham as an example of ‘faith’). And then we have these wonderful words about how ‘since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through Christ’ (5:1). Indeed, ‘while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly’ (5:6).

Then Paul expands on this highlighting (5:12) “sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.” But then Paul says (5:15): “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 free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many”.

What Paul is saying here is that we have one nature in us by 'natural birth'. We are 'in Adam'. There is a question among theologians about what this means. (Note re Adam as a 'historical' person). Are we 'in Adam' in that we 'inherit sin' like some 'genetic defect'? Or are we 'in Adam' in that Adam represents us all (and we would eventually have done the same as he did in the Garden long ago)? In the end, this is a debate that can lead to a 'dead end'. The Apostle Paul's point in referring to 'Adam' is to say that through the one man, Jesus Christ, God has brought about the possibility for a 'new nature' (Christ's nature) into the world.. Paul presents Adam as a type - a picture, a representation - of Jesus. Both Adam and Jesus were completely sinless men from the beginning, and both of them did things that had consequences for *all* humankind.

It is our nature to say, "It's not fair" and "It's not my fault" when we need to be honest with our own selves about our own sin and failure (and if you want to know what that is, look at the Ten Commandments, and Luther's explanation, and his 'Table of Duties' in the Small Catechism).

We are called to acknowledge 'sin' and 'battle sin' (Gospel). But we cannot truly 'overcome sin' and give the gift of 'life' in 'death'. And that is why Paul says (5:17), "If, because of the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive **the abundance of grace** and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ".

Do you know what it means to be struck by grace? It does not mean that we suddenly believe that God exists, or that Jesus is the Saviour, or that the Bible contains the truth. Yes – all of this *is* important. But 'grace' is much more than this. God's 'grace' is the reality that all sin is washed away on the shores of His love. (Note, not just 'my sin', but 'all sin'...) Grace conquers sin.

Sin is real. Death is real....

Jesus is real. His love is real....

And His gift of life and love is real for you always... You are 'accepted'.

God's 'grace' to us in Jesus means that we have a 'new way' of 'life'. This is a 'new way' both in terms of our actions, as well as our 'future. In the chapter that follows Paul says this (Romans 6:1-5), "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His".

In Jesus you have a new way of life.

We rejoice in the life and peace that God gives us here through Jesus. And this 'peace' that God gives us in Jesus is not simply a 'social peace' or an 'emotional peace' where we may *feel better* in the face of our troubles. Indeed, Jesus said (Luke 12:51), "I have not come to cause peace but division". The 'peace' God gives in Jesus is a 'spiritual peace'. It may affect us in the way we relate to people. But we have peace with God.

In Jesus God gives us not only a 'new way of life'; He gives us 'new life' itself.

To many people "sin" and "grace" are strange *words*; but they are not strange *things*. We experience sin and death in our world, and in our lives. You are guilty of sin. Make no mistake, writes Paul, we are guilty. But Paul declares our lives are not hopeless. Sin and death may have come into the world, but through the grace of the 'one man' we have been given the gift of *new life*. And here, our trust is not in 'self'; it is in Jesus. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have pardon, and we may stand before God.

In the season of Lent we pray that the Holy Spirit may 'renew' us in this 'new way of life', both in action and our hope of eternal life in Jesus. Amen.