

Rev. Matthew Versemann
Trinity Lutheran Church
Decatur, Illinois
Sunday School Rally Day
September 13th, 2020

GOD'S AIRPLANE

I've chosen two texts for my Rally Day message today. The first is from Genesis, "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good...And God said, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.'"

And also from John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have everlasting life."

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

Today's message will be in the form of a parable, which I've entitled: "God's Airplane". So I want all of you to put up your tray tables. Put your pews in the full, upright position, and get ready for take-off.

Now, let's begin with creation. Imagine if, after God created Adam and Eve, instead of putting them in the Garden of Eden, He would have put them on an airplane. In other words, I want you to think of life in the Garden of Eden in "Airplane Terms" this morning. So I prop this nice little prop along with me to use. Imagine that this Airplane represents the Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve on board. And our loving God is living with Adam and Eve on this airplane. And the airplane is on a non-stop flight to the Kingdom of Heaven, where it will land safely, and everyone who is on board the plane will live happily ever after. Now, seated in the Pilot's seat is God, the Father. And seated in the Co-Pilot's seat is God, the Son! And the Holy Spirit is The Comforter, making sure that you enjoy your flight!

Alright, now that you have that image of Adam and Eve soaring with God on God's Airplane on their way home to heaven, I want to ask you a question. Remember that this is a parable intended to teach you God's Word. So, the question I'd like to ask you is this:

WHAT ARE THE TWO WORST THINGS THAT YOU CAN DO WHEN YOU'RE ON AN AIRPLANE? Don't answer yet. But ponder that question.

When God created Adam and Eve, He created them in His own image – that is, in the perfect Image of Christ. Thus, Adam and Eve were sinless, righteous, and very good. The image of God means that they also knew the will of God, and loved His will and wanted to do it. There was nothing wrong with Adam and Eve; and they were created to live with God the Father (the pilot), Jesus Christ (the Co-Pilot), and the Holy Spirit (the Steward or Comforter on the flight), FOREVER, first of all on God's Airplane, and finally, when they landed safely at the destination of heaven.

Now, on God's Airplane, God gave Adam and Eve many gifts to enjoy: fruits and nuts, in-flight joys and pleasures, freedom to explore His beautiful plane, life and love. But He also gave them one safety rule – for their own protection – so that they would remain safely on the plane, and land safely to live forever in heaven. The one rule that the Pilot, the Co-Pilot, and the Comforter gave to Adam and Eve was this in Genesis 2, ***“You are free to eat of any tree on the Airplane – God even had an indoor garden on his airplane – but you must NOT eat of the fruit of the Tree of the knowing of good and evil; for when you eat of it you will surely die.”***

Now let's translate God's command in 'Airplane Terms'. It was as if God was saying to them, *‘We're going to be cruising comfortably on our way to heaven. It should be a perfect flight. Just relax, enjoy your flight, and leave the flying to us! You're free to take off your seatbelt, walk around the plane, go wherever you want. The whole plane is yours' to enjoy. You can even come into the cockpit to visit your Pilot and Co-Pilot at any time. There's just one rule you must follow – for your own safety – namely, LEAVE THE FLYING TO US! Why? Because only our Pilot – God the Father, and our Co-Pilot – Jesus, know how to land the plane safely in heaven.*

So Adam and Eve were told – for their own safety – **YOU NEED TO LEAVE THE FLYING TO US**, by, *“Not eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowing of good and evil, because it’s our job as Pilot and Co-Pilot, God and Son of God, to manage good and evil, in order to protect your life from evil. We’re the only ones who know how to handle evil, and how to bring the airplane and your lives in for a safe landing.”*

Now, many people ask the question: *“Why did God create this tree, and then tell Adam and Eve to not eat from it?”*. Or, to put it another way, *“Why did God invite us into the cockpit, and then tell us we couldn’t fly?”* Perhaps it was a protective command. In other words, God knew that the devil was lurking in that tree, trying to Hi-Jack God’s Airplane, God’s Garden, by getting Adam and Eve to sin, so that he could bring God’s airplane down to a fiery crash.

But, I believe that Luther hit the nail on the head when he said, *“God gave Adam and Eve the tree of the fruit of the knowing of good and evil, and then said , ‘You are not to eat from it’; or, we might say, ‘He let them into the cockpit, and then said but you can’t sit in the Pilot’s seat and fly the plane’; either way, this was how Adam and Eve could worship God.”* That is, by not eating of the fruit of the tree, or by not sitting in the Pilot’s seat trying to fly God’s Airplane, they would be honoring and worshiping God. They would be saying, *“You’re God! You’re the Pilot! And we’re not. You’re in control, and you’re simply trying to protect us, and give us life in heaven; so we’re going to obey you, and leave the flying to you.”*

Which brings me back to my original question: **“WHAT ARE THE TWO WORST THINGS THAT YOU CAN DO WHEN YOU’RE ON AN AIRPLANE?”**

1. **JUMP OUT OF THE AIRPLANE WITHOUT A PARACHUTE, or,**
2. **HI-JACK THE PLANE, AND TAKE OVER THE PILOT’S SEAT, WHEN YOU DON’T KNOW HOW TO FLY THE PLANE.**

BOTH OPTIONS ARE DEADLY CHOICES!

When Adam and Eve sinned, and when you and I sin, that is as foolish and deadly as jumping out of an airplane without a parachute, or Hi-Jacking the plane, and taking over the pilot's seat when you don't know how to fly the plane. Even though we all sin, and we all sin daily, sin is actually the most insane thing a passenger on God's plane can do, because when we sin, we are doing what we know will kill us eternally.

Think of it like this: Sinning against God is like jumping out of an airplane without a parachute, at 30,000 feet. Now the first 29,999 feet of your sinning might be a lot of fun, but it's the last foot that's a problem. Sin leads to death, as surely as flying without a parachute. To coin a phrase, "*One small sin for man. One deadly fall for mankind.*" Romans 5 declares, "***Sin entered the world (entered the plane) through one man, and death through sin; and in this way death has come upon all mankind – all the passengers on the plane – because all have sinned.***"

So how did Adam and Eve's jumping out of God's Airplane, without a parachute, by their sin, affect you and me? Here's how! Ever since Adam and Eve jumped out of God's Airplane, by their sinning, everyone of us is now born "*outside of God's Airplane, and we're born in a falling condition, headed to a certain and deadly crash; unless someone rescues us before we crash and burn in hell.*" Psalm 51, "***In sin was I born, and in sin did my mother conceive me.***" And Ephesians 2 says, "***We are by nature objects of wrath.***"

And yet, even though we're plunging to our death apart from Christ, sin is so blinding, that it will lead you to love what will kill you. The joy of sinning is often as exhilarating as flying through the air for 29,999 feet; but the last foot is a huge problem. In fact, when you're flying through the air at several hundred miles an hour, how long it will be before you crash can be very deceptive. Only the Lord knows how close that day is when each of our lives will crash in death. Hebrews 11 says, "***The pleasures of sins last but a moment, but the consequences of sin are eternal.***" Your sin and mine will always lead to death, and it will always lead to eternal death, unless we're rescued, and brought back into the safety of God's airplane.

And the other deadly choice you can make when you're on an Airplane is to Hi-Jack the Pilot's seat, when you don't know how to fly!

Luther said, "*Whenever you and I sin, no matter what commandment we may be breaking, we are always breaking the First Commandment, because we are living as though we were God, when we're not.*" One of the greatest lies the devil ever tempted us with, goes all the way back to his very first temptation of Adam and Eve which was: "*You can be like God yourself.*" When we sin, we are Hi-Jacking the Pilot's seat, when we don't know how to fly. We are pretending to be God, when we're not! And whether you and I admit it or not, we do not know how to fly the Plane of our own lives safely to heaven. The darkness and fog of sin is too great. We will crash. Our sin is thinking we can go into the cockpit that belongs to God, remove the pilot, taking over the controls of our life, and believing we can land safely in heaven by ourselves. We believe we don't need to Co-Pilot, Jesus, either. And if He gets in the way of our sinning, we'll just have to kill him on a cross, and in our hearts. But only God the Father and Jesus know how to "fly the baby" of God's Airplane to heaven and land safely. So, as we begin another year of Sunday School and Bible classes today, we are not here to learn how to fly our lives on our own, or how to land our lives safely in heaven on our own. We are here to learn how to arrive safely in heaven, and how to help others arrive safely in heaven, which is only through the saving work of our Co-Pilot, Jesus Christ; and learning to live our lives, while leaving the flying to Jesus.

So what does our Pilot (God the Father), and the Co-Pilot (Jesus Christ), and the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) want us to learn through worship, and God's Word. In fact, they know that we will repeatedly try to jump off the plane without a parachute, and that we will repeatedly try to Hi-Jack God's Airplane. But here's the solution, when you and I jumped out of God's Airplane, just like Adam and Eve, by our sinning, and playing God, our Pilot didn't give up on us. God loved and loves those who have jumped away from him in sin, Who have Hi-Jacked their lives by sinning, by sending the Co-Pilot – His only Son, Jesus – on a daring, one might even add deadly rescue mission to save us from our falling and crashing condition. Jesus left the Co-Pilot's seat, and put on the crash gear of flesh and blood. And jumped out of God's airplane crying, "*I'll take the crash for you!*" Page 5

Phillipians 2 says, ***“Who, being in very nature God – the Pilot – did not consider his being equal with God – the Pilot – something to be grasped and held onto. But He made Himself nothing (leaving the Co-Pilot’s seat), and became obedient unto death, putting on the crash gear of flesh and blood, even death on a cross.”***

But to all of us who acknowledge the utter foolishness of jumping away from God to enjoy the thrill of sin for 29,999 feet, with a messy ending; and to all who confess our sin of having constantly Hi-jacked the Pilot’s seat, so we could fly our lives the way we wanted, only to reach the inevitable conclusion that if I keep trying to fly my life on my own, when I don’t know how to fly my life safely to heaven, I’m going to die, to all of us, our Pilot loves us so much He’s given us a way back onto the plane.

You see, after our Co-Pilot jumped out of the plane, He crashed in our place on the cross, so that the Pilot would no longer be mad at us and our sins. And then the Pilot, God the Father glorified His son, the Co-Pilot, by raising him from the dead, and seating Him back in the Co-Pilot’s seat, at the right hand of the Pilot, having paid for every sin that would destroy our lives and keep us out of heaven. So that, with all of our sins paid for, our Pilot now turns the plane around, and is circling back to rescue sinners who are plummeting in a free-fall to their death by their sins.

And now that Jesus has purchased our rescue, and is Himself our Savior, He jumps out of the plane, for one sinner at a time, sort of like Iron Man in the movie Iron Man 3, and he catches us, one sinner at a time, and gives us the parachute of our Baptism. 1st Peter 3, ***“Baptism now saves you!”*** He also puts us safely back on God’s airplane through His saving words in John 6, ***“Whoever believes in Me has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*** Sinners come to worship and Bible class to get back on God’s airplane. Ephesians 2 says, ***“God raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms – back on God’s Airplane.”*** Because of Jesus, our Pilot, now reassures us, ***“This is your pilot speaking. We’re glad to have you on-board our Airplane called ‘Grace’. You’re Co-Pilot has handled all the turbulence of sin, death, hell and devil; so that you are safe. Until we land in heaven, feel free to take off your seatbelts, for Christ has set you free. During your flight enjoy the refreshing water of your baptism, the bread which is Christ’s body, and the wine that is His blood. Feel free to visit us in the cockpit, we love seeing you and talking to you. We’ll be arriving at our destination soon. Have fun and leave the flying to us!”***