

MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

December 18, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

Advent Midweek 3

Lesson: [Genesis 3:16-24](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 27c CW

Lesson/Devotion: [Revelation 22:1-5](#)

CHRISTMAS TREES

THE TREE OF LIFE

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

What is it like to be waiting for Christmas? What do you kids think? Are there toys and presents starting to fill up underneath the Christmas tree? Are you waiting for that day? The older people, are you waiting for that day to gather together to eat those favorite foods? Maybe you are waiting to have a little bit of vacation, a little bit of time, a little time off and time to spend with loved ones. Waiting is a hard thing to do, especially when you know something good is coming. But also it's hard when the things in front of us are kind of tempting.

There is this famous example. This was done by a psychologist, Walter Mischel. I don't know if you've heard about this one where you put a kid in a room and you give him one marshmallow. Then you say "If you cannot eat that marshmallow until I come back, you'll get a second marshmallow." What do you think? How would you do? If you had to wait 5 minutes or 10 minutes or 20 minutes, would you eat that



marshmallow? Or would you have self-control to not eat that marshmallow and be able to get two marshmallows? It's fun to watch it all here, but you can look him up and you see a lot of people are playing around with it and some people will take a little nibble. I watched one other presentation and the guy said "This one girl ate the middle of it and folded it back up to look like she didn't eat any of it." When there is something in front of you, it's hard to wait. When there are certain pleasures and certain things in front of

us, it's hard. The psychologist who did this experiment said it's about self-control and even as he talks about it, he begins by saying "We've struggled with self-control from the first time Adam and Even struggled with self-control." There was this Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and they couldn't control it. They couldn't control being tempted by the devil and even though they had all this goodness around them, they could not control their temptation.

There is a saying that might help us to think about this in our lives. Maybe you've seen this sign before. It's an oil company. There is also a band. But there is a pastor who



had a church here in the area and he used the "STP" and "LTP" to help us remember how we struggle with self-control. STP is "short-term pleasure" brings "long-term pain." Have you experienced that? Maybe that bag of chocolate. Think not just of a marshmallow but if you had that bag of chocolate and you sit there and "Oh, I could just eat a little bit more." You eat a little bit more and what happens if you just eat a little bit more, a little bit more? Later, you have a tummy ache. You can think about all sorts of things where you have this pleasure. The devil tempts us to have this pleasurable experience that we know we shouldn't do. And even though I get a little bit of pleasure, then it brings a long-term pain.

You can flip the idea around, too, to say "short-term pain" can often bring "long-term pleasure." How does that happen? If you work out, then you have that pain of your muscles having worked out and that's a good thing for your body. Or maybe sometimes dieting and not eating all of the delicious foods, that short-term pain of not eating can bring a long-term pleasure.

What is true as we look at the **Tree of Life** and what is promised to us is that we struggle so much with what is coming because of all the pleasure, all of the things in this life, and we say "God, when are you going to bring that true restoration." And in the midst of all of that, we have all these little pleasures that we can go after. It's hard. We know that's what Adam and Eve did, so that is what we struggle with. But then we have a promise that there is restoration, this Tree of Life. We see what this will look like.

It says: ***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 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*** All of the pain, all of the darkness

is gone! It's gone! God is now the Light. We don't need the sun. We don't a lamp. There is no longer any curse! It's all gone! This is what is awaiting us—the true Tree of Life and life eternal with our Lord.

But that's hard. It's hard to wait for that. We can talk about the short-term pleasure and the pain in our lives, but sometimes you can also say "God, why would you allow this pain in my life?" You think about what is ahead and we say "God, why can't you just make things right? Why did you let this person die? Why did this cancer come?" We struggle with these short-term pains because we don't understand how great it is ahead. So we can get frustrated with God because we have these pains, but we don't have an idea of how great the restoration will be. Jesus is going to bring us peace. Notice what it says. We will have His name on our heads. We will see His face.

I always tell kids that when we are baptized, we know that God is writing His name on us. It's like we are His possession. We are no longer cast off because of our sin, but we are God's children. This is the promise that we have. This is the assurance that we have. We get to see God face-to-face! The only way that could happen is if our sin is removed, because our sins separate us from God. So how does that happen?

It's an interesting thing to think about the Tree of Life. There are two different pictures here. This is from an artist called Chris Powers. He does a lot of Christian art. See if you can see in both pictures in the middle—you see a tree but then one has the Water of Life that is talked about and the other one has the leaves which bring life. Do you notice in each of the trees what is in there in the middle? It's Jesus. The Tree of Life—what gives us true life, is Christ. When it says that there will no longer be any curse, it's because Jesus went to the cross. He was made a curse for you and for me, so we do not need to face it anymore. We will be with God because of the work of Christ, of what He has done. He gives us true eternal life.

Is that a hard thing to wait for? It is! The temptations and the pleasures that the devil gives us are hard things to fight off, to avoid that pain that we know that brings. The short-term pain that we experience of sin and death and all the struggles of living in this world, is that hard to face? When you know what is ahead (the Tree of Life that gives life to everyone) you can face anything. You can know that you have been restored and redeemed and we have this to look forward to because of Christ, because of Christmas, because our Savior came to live and die for us and to go to the cross, to take our sins and to rise again so we can know that we will live forever with Him, where there will



be Light. No more darkness. No more sin. No more pain; only God and Light. This is what the Tree of Life gives and what you have in store. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.