

Confirmed in God's Garden

☛ **Fatal attraction (vv.8-13)**

✚ **Amazing Grace (vv.14,15)**

In the name of Name of Jesus, the Enemy-Crusher, dear family of God, especially you, dear Ava:

For some of us it's hard to relate. You get them talking about their garden, and there's no stopping them. One man could go on for hours about the roses he raised, but strangely, never sat down and just enjoyed the wonder of them. For some of us, gardening was a battle with weeds our parents assigned, but we'd rather dig irrigation ditches and play in the mud. If it's not the rock hard clay baking you to heat exhaustion in the sun, it's the insects attacking. Around here high fences are needed to keep out the deer. Some folks seem to overcome it all with a strong arm and a green thumb.

For your Confirmation, Ava, we need to go back to the first **Garden**, the one called Eden. Here we see the death of everything good by an enemy worse than an army of insects. But here we also get to see new life as God begins His own Church of saints on earth. Ruined by **Fatal attraction**, then restored by **Amazing Grace** – this is really your story and ours as we too are **Confirmed in God's Garden**.

☛ **Fatal attraction (vv.8-13)**

Hiding from God seems so natural these days, at least for some who believe there is a God and take Him seriously. But far too many want to criticize every detail of this story. First they claim it's just myth and legend, then attack it as if they fear it's true. Reminds me of a friend years ago spinning along on icy roads, waving at folks "going way too slow." After we landed in a ditch, he was too embarrassed to talk to them when they stopped to help. It's so much our human condition to see people in trouble, but never pause to consider that could be us. In fact, this is us, the whole human race, you too, dear Ava.

Why did God's voice scare them that day, the first couple so happy to be alive in **God's Garden** paradise? When the cooling breeze of late afternoon and evening came up, they heard His voice like every other day. But this time instead of a warm welcome and family fellowship, they hid from His face among the trees. Something was terribly wrong. They had never felt so terrified of Him before.

All they knew of their Creator previously was His kindness and care for them. There was no reason to be afraid, because they had not disobeyed any of His commands. Basically, He told them to enjoy His **Garden**, and as long as they did not violate that one command, all was well. So why would you spend two years learning the Ten Commandments and how they condemn us all?

These lessons every sinner needs to learn, sad facts about our human condition. One young man highly respected by his friends, felt the terror of God's law in a lightning storm. Remember how he took an oath of poverty, thinking if he got rid of all his possessions and served God night and day, his fear would go away? Martin Luther hid behind the stone walls of a cloister like Adam and Eve among the trees of the Garden. Looking back years later, Luther would write, "*Yet deep and deeper still I fell; Life had become a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me.*" (CW 377:2)

We all fall for Satan's lie like Adam and Eve. First, try to be the master of your own destiny. Do what feels good, even if God says, "No!" Then when you fall, shame sets in, foolish, blind, senseless guilt that tries to hide from God. What is it about God our Creator that He refuses to stay away and let us hide? Why does He come looking, calling, seeking sinners? We would destroy anyone who disappointed us so much – maybe not physically, but with our words. We would walk away for ever.

“Adam, where are you?...Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?...Woman, what have you done?” God knows the answers to all these questions. But it’s not just Almighty God asking as an angry judge. This is the LORD God, the Savior-God who punishes all sin and forgives all sin. How to understand that seeming contradiction needs help. And that guilty monk in the cloister trying to work off his guilt, wrote another hymn, a favorite of yours, Ava. Some think we make too much of Martin Luther. I did too until I started reading Luther’s sermons and focusing on his hymns. He suffered the same struggles of conscience we feel when we hear how we have violated every single commandment of God by doing evil and failing to do good. *“Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord! May all your graces be outpoured....”* Only this *“Guide divine”* can cause God’s *“Word of light to shine”* with joy and delight in our hearts, to correct our errors and set us free from guilt and fear. Only our *“Comfort true”* can light the holy fire of God’s love that brings us near for warmth and tenderness instead of terror and wretchedness. (CW 176)

Ava, my dear sister in Christ, you have know this conquering love of God since the Word powered water was poured on your head in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The dear Holy Spirit taught you so much of God’s Word that one of your biggest challenges beginning Catechism two years ago was not mixing up all the Bible passages in your head and heart. You learned to run away from the **Fatal attraction** of sin into the wide open arms of...

✠ **Amazing Grace (vv.14,15)**

Try to imagine growing up without all this solid Christian education. I know you have a heart for people not privileged like you because you’ve brought friends to study God’s Word with you. But what if you had been fighting God all your life, sure that none of this was true? You might grow up like one young man running deeper and deeper into gross immorality. His father was a sea captain on slave ships. His son John was so cruel to the slaves that even seasoned seamen got sick of him. They put him in the British Navy, maybe to learn something there. When he deserted, slave traders captured him, turned the tables and made him a slave. Sailing for England, bored, he started reading a Christian book, then slammed it shut. *“What if these things are true?”* He went to bed still stubborn until a storm dumped tons of water down the hatches. Certain they’d sink, he dreaded death as never before. March 10, 1748, dawned still afloat. To the Bible, to the pulpit! John Newton treasured **Amazing Grace** – *“how sweet the sound – That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, Was blind but now I see.”*

Or what if you grew up blind like a girl 100 years later? A traveling doctor put mustard poultices on her eyes because she had a cold. The cure was worse than the cold. Poetry became her heart’s expression until she was famous at age 44. Presidents and Congress wanted to hear her rhymes. Finally she heard singing of Isaac Watts’ words: *“Alas! and did my Savior bleed And did my Sov’ reign die? Would he devote that sacred head For sinners such as I?...Here, Lord, I give myself away – ‘Tis all that I can do.”* (CW 129) But the Lord gave Himself to her when a friend suggested she write hymns. For 51 years, starting age 44 to 95, Fanny Crosby wrote 8,000 hymns. We close today with a favorite: *“To God Be the Glory; great things he has done! He so loved the world that he gave us his Son...”* (CW 399)

That promise ended the blame game in **God’s Garden** – Adam blaming God for the woman, the woman passing blame onto Satan – no one willing to say, *“I sinned. I’m sorry.”* God’s **Amazing Grace** teaches, empowers us to honest confession. The First Gospel Promise, spoken to the serpent-Satan-enemy, was beyond imagination: The Seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. The Holy Spirit through Isaiah repeated, expanded: *“The virgin will be with child...Immanuel.”* (7:17) A grieving Joseph, afraid Mary had cheated on him, heard the angel repeat that promise: Her child will be the Son of God, *“God with us.”* (Matthew 1:20-25) How blessed we are to receive Jesus: *“This is my body...my blood.”*

We know Adam believed God’s promise. He did not name his wife (אֵוָה), ~~“mother of the dead and dying.”~~ He named her, אֵוָה, so close to Ava. **Confirmed in God’s Garden.** Praise Jesus! Amen.

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