

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT  
Genesis 2:7-9,15-17; 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11  
Man vs. the Devil: Round Two

Round one wasn't pretty. The opponent used moves our first parents had never seen before. The whole exchange was new to them. They were awkward in the ring. They were in good shape, though, having only one weakness, one opening. *"And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'"* One tree; one command, and their greatest worship was keeping it, and so that is where the opponent struck.

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"* *"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

In catechism class, there are several Luther quotes I like to discuss regarding the devil. First, *"A serpent slithers through small openings"* (*What Luther Says*, 400). If you've ever used a wedge, you know that once you get the thin edge in, the rest goes easily. *"A serpent slithers through small openings"* and once he gets through, small openings become gaping holes. Your own experience will confirm that once you have given in to a certain sin it is harder and harder to avoid it later. Know your weaknesses, because the devil knows them, and will quickly lay siege to them with an unrelenting barrage of *"Did God really say?"*

Second: *"Wherever God erects a church, the devil builds his chapel or tavern next to it; that is, wherever God's Word springs up in its purity, the devil ushers in sects, factions, and many false spirits, who also deck themselves with the glory and the name of Christ and His church"* (LW AE 24.27, John 16:1). The devil works hardest on Christians, especially on active Christians. Why work nearly as hard on those unbelievers he already possesses? Rather, bite off the head, and the body dies. Overcome the faithful servants in the church, and the weak and impressionable will soon follow. Infect the pastor's preaching and the uncritical flock errs as well. Cast the pastor or a leader of the congregation into sin and the congregation implodes, dividing against itself. As confessional Lutheran Christians who seek to faithfully preserve and proclaim the gospel, we are often a spiritual Fallujah, subject to the unrelenting terrorism of the enemy. We must be in the Word, and we must be in the Word regularly, if we are going to fend off his well-planned and deadly insurgency. We must fight as the family of God, encouraging each other in the fight, binding each other's wounds when he strikes a blow, bringing each other to safety when we wander from the fortress of God's Word and Sacraments.

The third quote is from one of our Lutheran Confessions, the Smalcald Articles:

*This is all the old devil and the old snake, who also turned Adam and Eve into enthusiasts and led them from the external Word of God to 'spirituality' and their own presumption...In the same way, our enthusiasts condemn the external Word, and yet they themselves do not keep silent. Instead, they fill the world with*

*their chattering and scribbling—as if the Spirit could not come through the Scriptures or the spoken word of the apostles, but the Spirit must come through their own writings and words. (SA 322.5)*

The word “enthusiast” is not a compliment here. It comes from the Greek “spiritualist,” and was applied to people who placed their own opinions or desires on par with God’s, oftentimes operating without a distinction between the two, as if what they thought was, by the very fact that they thought it, what God thought, and what they wanted was, by the very fact that they wanted it, what God wanted. A good example would be those churches of our day whose message basically boils down to God wants you to be happy, and so what makes you happy will make God happy, so do what you want to do and be happy. Thus, many bookstores today, as in Luther’s day, are full of men’s thoughts about God, but lack little if any of God’s thought about man, or God’s thoughts about God. In this way, poor souls are left wide open to Satan’s attack.

It is good and salutary to read good Christian literature, but it is best and most necessary to read the Word. What good is it if we can sing “Shine, Jesus, Shine” backwards and blindfolded and quote the latest primetime pastor if, when the devil attacks, he will not be thwarted by warm fuzzies. As a professor of mine used to tell us, “Garbage in, garbage out.” Vague, subjective, human “spirituality,” be it your own creation or someone else’s will make you easy prey for our crafty opponent. The devil is only thwarted by God’s Word, properly applied. It is wise to use the 3-2-1 rule for reading. Read three pages of Scripture to every two pages of the Lutheran Confessions to every one page of any other kind of Christian literature.

The Holy Gospel today is a continuation of the battle started in Genesis. Here we see round two of man versus the devil, and this round goes much better for the human race, because the devil now faces a more worthy Adam, the new Adam, Jesus Christ. The first Adam got pounded in the first round, in fact he completely lost it, bringing death to all his sons and daughters to come, including you and I. Sin was now no longer only a possibility, but a constant reality, and an inherent disease that strangled our souls and ravaged our bodies. All are now subject to sin, as evidenced by the fact that all are now subject to death, even the youngest, most innocent looking children. Yet round two was coming.

St. Paul writes, *“Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”* What Adam undid by sin, Christ has restored by grace. *“The gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”*

Take heart, weary warriors. The loss in round one was disastrous beyond measure. The victory in round two, however, ended the fight. Christ *was tempted in every way, yet was without sin*. He withstood the devil, and, on Good Friday, crushed the serpent’s head. With the devil, sin and death die as well. With their death comes new life to all for whom Christ fights. Stop fighting round one, battling the devil on your own, swinging your own thoughts and words instead of God’s. You cannot win that round. Join round two instead, making Christ’s victory your own through faith and learning from our Lord’s strategy, chasing Satan away with the most powerful weapon we have: God’s Word. Amen.