

## Dueling with the Devil

Genesis 3:1-15

Feb. 22, 2026 (Lent 1-A)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

*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 certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

*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 realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

*He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

*And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"*

*The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."*

*Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"*

*The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

*So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:1-15, NIV)*

Dear friends in Jesus Christ, the devil-slayer:

"En garde!" Two fencers took their positions and began their duel. With their protective gear and equipment, the thrusts and jabs in the duel do not actually produce serious wounds or result in death. But duels in the past, with swords or pistols or other weapons of choice, sometimes did end in death. In the most famous duel in American history, in 1804 Aaron Burr shot Alexander Hamilton dead in a duel.

The first duel in history happened in our text—the duel between the devil and the first woman, Eve. It didn't result in instant death, but it proved to be the deadliest duel of all. For ever since that time, mankind has been **Dueling with the Devil**. Let us learn from that first duel about our own duels with the devil.

The first duel took place in the Garden of Eden, paradise. God's world was perfect. He had created man and woman in his image—holy, with their will and thoughts in line with God's thoughts. But into this perfect world came the devil, in the guise of a snake. We know from elsewhere in the Bible that the devil was originally a good angel who somehow turned evil, led a rebellion against God and was cast out of heaven. More than that, we do not know and cannot say.

Cast out of heaven, the devil looked to inflict as much damage as he could in God's world. Through the snake he came to attack the woman, Eve. We note his dueling tactics. First, he tried to plant doubt in Eve's mind what God really said: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" When Eve replied correctly that God didn't say that, it was just the one tree in the middle of the garden that they were not to eat from or touch, or they would die, the devil found an opening. His next attack was an outright lie: "No, you certainly will not die! God's lying to you! For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Notice the subtlety of the attack. Along with the lie was a half-truth: "You'll be like God, knowing good and evil." Well, true, by disobeying God they would get to know evil as well as good. But weren't they already like God, in his image? That image of God, their holiness would shatter by disobeying him. They would have known good but now would only know evil.

The devil's deceptions are still his main tactics in our duels with the devil. He tries to get us to doubt God's Word and his love for us. "Did God really say that in the Bible?" he makes us wonder. "How could a loving God permit you to suffer? Try it my way!" He contradicts God's Word and twists it to make good sound bad and bad sound good. The devil also plants this lie in our hearts: "You can be like God. Be your own boss. Don't let anyone else tell you what's good for you." It's no wonder that the name "devil" means deceiver or slanderer, and Jesus called the devil "a liar and the father of all lies" (John 8:44c).

Jesus also called him "a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him" (John 8:44b). That's what happened in the first duel with the devil. Eve took the bait, literally. She listened to the devil instead of plugging her ears and saying, "Get behind me, Satan! I'm listening to God instead!" She looked at the fruit of the forbidden tree, and her heart was filled with desire: That was good food she could have! That's the sin of coveting, wanting what God forbids. And then came the outright act of disobedience. She "took some and ate it." And where was Adam? Adam was no less guilty than Eve. When Eve offered Adam some of the fruit, he followed his wife into the sin instead of being her head to warn her not to listen to that snake and disobey God. The devil defeated them both in this duel, and as a result they would die.

The next few verses show us how much their nature changed. "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." No longer did they view their naked bodies with pure thoughts; the sin in them caused them to feel shame. Then they heard God walking in the garden, and they tried to hide from him, like kids who crash a china set with their horseplay and try to hide when mom comes running into the room. Adam and Eve were afraid of God, and felt guilt. And when God called them to account, what did they do? Adam didn't take responsibility but blamed his wife: "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree," and in doing so really blamed God. ("You gave me this woman, now look what happened!") Likewise, Eve blamed the snake. No confession, no repentance, just pointing the finger at someone else.

Shame, fear, guilt, blame—that's our sorry state too as a result of this duel with the devil. For this duel caused defeat for all of us. We heard it in today's epistle reading: "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (Ro. 5:12). "Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners" (Ro. 5:19a). Adam and Eve's sin and disobedience got passed down to their children, all the way down to us. The

image of God, their holiness, was now shattered. We are born in the image of Adam, not God, conceived and born in sinfulness. We cannot duel with the devil on our own and win; we are already defeated because of the sinful nature in us siding with the devil, and therefore we too must die, and face eternal condemnation for our sins.

But the Lord intervened in this duel. First, he punished the snake itself. It would “crawl on its belly and eat dust.” Still today the sight of a slithering snake reminds us of its role in the fall into sin. But then, and most importantly, the Lord addressed the devil behind that snake: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers.” Who would the devil’s offspring or descendants be? The Lord is referring to those who follow the devil, unbelievers, as Jesus pointed out to his opponents: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires” (Jn. 8:44a). The devil and his children, unbelievers, keep dueling with believers.

Then a promise: “He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” One specific descendant of the woman would arise. The devil will duel with him, and strike at his heel; but this person will inflict the severest wound by crushing his head.

That descendant of the woman was Jesus of Nazareth. John stated his purpose in coming: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 Jn. 3:8). Crush that old serpent’s head! Jesus dueled with the devil in the wilderness, as we saw in today’s gospel reading. Jesus, a true human being, was at his weakest, starving, but he didn’t give in to any of the devil’s temptations and never once in his life succumbed to sin. Jesus dueled with the devil in the Garden of Gethsemane, that night that he was about to drink the bitter cup of woes, suffering for us. The devil tempted him to shirk his responsibilities, take the easy way out, but Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done.” While Jesus was on the cross, the devil used mockers to test Jesus: “Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” (Mt. 27:40b), and then “we will believe in him” (Mt. 27:42b).

Jesus dueled with the devil and defeated him every step of the way. The Son obeyed his Father’s will to his dying breath. By doing so he canceled the debt of sin, and he has brought “life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). Jesus has defeated the devil and delivered us from eternal death!

As believers, you and I are still dueling with the devil. He comes at us every day with his deceptions and temptations. Be armed with God’s Word. And most of all, pray to Jesus, trust in him. He will deliver you, because he defeated the devil for you! Amen.