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## The Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 6, 2021

### Jesus Came to Destroy the Works of the Devil

“Satan is alive and well and living on planet earth.” The well-known author Hal Lindsay had it right way back in 1972 as he observed the satanic evil that has taken over our world. Unlike so many, Christians never consign the activity of Satan to fairy tales or make-believe; we know the devil is very real because we feel his power in our own lives. We do not fear Satan, however, for we believe that Jesus destroyed the devil’s wicked works.

#### First Reading

**Genesis 3:8-15**

*God forecasts the battle between Christ and Satan.*

#### Second Reading

**Revelation 20:1-6**

*John sees the destruction of Satan by Christ.*

#### Gospel

**Mark 3:20-35**

*Jesus defended himself against the charge that he was a demon.*

#### Sermon

**Genesis 3:8-15**

### Where Are You?

Introduction: You don’t have to be a Christian to know that there is a force of evil in our world. You can be a Jew in Jerusalem or a Muslim in Mecca or a Buddhist in Bangkok and you know about evil. You don’t have to be a Christian to know about Adolph Hitler or Jim Crow or 9/11 to know about evil. You just have to know some history. You don’t have to be a Christian to know about pornography on the internet or gang killings in Chicago or genocide in China to know about evil. You just have to know what’s going on in the world. Even evil doers admit to the reality of evil.

You do have to be a Christian to know the start and the source of evil. People who aren’t Christians have their own theories about when evil began or where evil comes from, but we know because the Bible tells us. Evil started with a rebellion; an angel turned against God. There was a war in heaven and God won. God threw the angel down to earth and named him Satan. That was the start of evil and Satan is the source of evil. Every human being since creation has had to deal with Satan and every human creature until Judgment Day will have to deal with Satan. Including us.

Jesus had to deal with Satan, too. Satan tried to kill Jesus just after he was born, but King Herod missed Jesus and killed a bunch of babies instead. Satan tried to tempt Jesus to set aside his confidence in God. Satan used Peter to try to talk Jesus out of the cross. In the Gospel for today the Jewish religious leaders even accused Jesus of being possessed by Satan.

Jesus annihilated their charge, but that’s a sermon for another day. This morning we’re going to focus on the First Reading for this Sunday from Genesis chapter 3. Satan is in this reading, too, but in a different way. The war in heaven is past and Satan is living on planet earth. He’s taken on the form of a talking snake and he’s slithering through a tree in the middle of a garden. Satan tricks God’s perfect creatures into disobeying God. He convinces the woman first, then the man, to do what God has told them not to do: they eat fruit from a certain tree. And that’s where the First Reading begins.

1. If Satan is guilty of the first demonic rebellion, Adam and Eve are guilty of the first human sin. God gave them everything the Garden of Eden had to offer except one thing: they were not to eat from a tree called “THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL.” God had created them with the ability to do only good, but they certainly knew what evil was: evil was eating from the that tree. When they ate, they knew instantly that they had done evil. They must have looked at each other and said, My God, what have we done?

It wasn't long before God told them what they had done. **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.** Of course, they had never hidden before; they loved being around God. Not anymore. They knew what they had done and so did God. **The LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”** You would expect a confession here, right? You'd expect tears and shame. You'd expect them to fall on their faces in horrible humility. Nope. **I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.** Afraid because he was naked!? Adam had been naked from the moment God had formed him. So all of the sudden he's being modest? That's not what's going on. Adam is dodging the problem; he's skirting the issue. God's not having any of it. **Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?** Adam is caught red handed. Now the confession, right? Now the tears. Nope. **The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.** She made me do it. Actually, God since you created her for me, you made me do it. Eve gets in line behind Adam. God said, **What is this you have done?** And Eve points her finger at Satan. **The serpent deceived me, and I ate.**

No fire from heaven, no stone-splitting earthquake, no tree-bending storm. God came to his first son and daughter in a quiet and sad voice: **Where are you?** he called. What did God hear? No voice of sorrow, no heart-rending honesty, no gut-wrenching grief. They responded to God's call by excusing and accusing. But God knew.

There are no forbidden trees in our gardens, but there is forbidden fruit in our lives. Evil is everywhere and it's not just in history books or the internet. There is evil in us and there is evil around us. There is also a slimy, slithering serpent named Satan who smiles from ear to ear as he tempts us to grab it and chomp on it. The fruit is appealing like anger or gossip or pride. The fruit is shiny like greed or lust or envy. The fruit is soft and supple like laziness or selfishness or fearfulness. There it is, all ours to just take and enjoy—and so often that's exactly what we do.

And then we hear a voice calling to us: **Where are you?** It's a loving voice, a gentle voice, a voice that searches for our honesty and shame and confession. It's a voice that longs to hear us regret and repent and change our ways. The voice of God doesn't expect excuses and accusations. When Satan gets you to sin and when God comes calling in love, **don't try to hide.** Face up to the reality of Satan and the seriousness of sin. When he comes looking for you, return to the Savior who wants to find you.

2. Deep down, Adam and Eve knew what they had done. We've all done some pretty nasty things in our lives, but we can't imagine what they must have felt like. Trembling in their boots doesn't describe it—well, they didn't have boots. They had come face to face with Satan and had discovered what guilt felt like.

God's real issue was with Satan, not with them. The Lord knew what Satan was up to. Satan didn't give a rip about Adam and Eve. Satan's target was God. If he could destroy God's perfect creation and ruin God's perfect creatures, he would crush God's perfect glory. So God came up with a plan for Satan. First, he handled the symbol, the snake. **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.** When's the last time you saw a snake walking on legs? The last time you saw a snake in the grass and didn't cringe? The last time you saw a snake in the water and didn't run for shore? The laws of nature still today reflect the Lord's verdict on Satan the serpent.

But God had more to say than predictions about snakes. On this day the battle between God and Satan began again. This time the battle was not to be fought in heaven but on earth. And this time it was a battle to the death. The conflict was between God's Son and all the demons of Satan. **God said, I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers.** In God's plan his one and only Son would take on human form and undo what Satan had done in the garden. Jesus would not eat forbidden fruit; he would have no sins to excuse. He would have had no

reason to hide from God. But then, on the cross, God hid from him. God turned his face away. But Jesus did not accuse. He did not blame God for his suffering, he did not blame us for his death. He carried the punishment we all deserved because we listened to the voice of Satan. And so he silenced the voice of Satan and restored love to the voice of God. And this is exactly what God promised that day: **My Son will crush your head and you will strike his heel.** Jesus' suffering was real, but his victory was complete.

We could tell stories about the evil of Satan for the rest of the day, and then we would have just begun. We have all experienced his temptations and his power to attract us and convince us. We know he is alive and well and living on planet earth and we know he is alive and well and living in our neighborhoods and even in our sinful natures. We know **he is our enemy and that he prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.** We need to be cautious and careful with the fruit that grows on the trees of our lives. We will take the bite more often than we wish. And God will come calling us--**Where are you?** We will hear the voice of God, but with Jesus, **don't be afraid.** Jesus put Satan in his place—in the domain of the damned—and Jesus holds us in the garden of grace. Amen.

Pastor Tiefel