

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

How to Crush a Snake

Genesis 3:8-15

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.⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me-- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.¹⁵ 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."

On a scale of 1 to 10, how competitive of a person are you? Are you on the low end of a scale where it is not so much about winning or losing as it is about having a good time and trying your hardest. Or are you on the high end of the scale where you turn every aspect of your life into a competition and you want to win every one of those contests. Wherever you are on that scale, I think everyone has at least a little competitive nature inside of them. I am going to appeal to that competitive side of you this morning and talk about a competition you are involved in. The opponent in this competition is probably the toughest one you will ever face—the ancient serpent, the devil. You know that you face this opponent day after day. You also probably realize that you are not going to be able to beat this opponent by your own skill or ability. You're going to need help. As we look at the first competition between mankind and the devil in the Garden of Eden, we find the way to win. It's actually a pretty surprising game plan. Yet there is only one strategy that will work if you want to crush a snake.

Our Scripture reading takes picks up right in the middle of that first contest. Some might say the contest was already over. Adam and Eve had lost. They had believed the devil's lie and gone against God's one command by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The truth is, that was only the beginning of the contest. It continued past the moment when they took the bite of the fruit. They were still involved in the struggle during the verses of our reading, and that struggle would continue past the time when our reading ends. We pick up the contest as Adam and Eve are hiding among the trees of the garden. It's really a sad scene. The thought of walking and talking with God in Paradise in the cool of the day is one that seems to be a wonderful thought. But because of sin, this

thought was terrifying to Adam and Eve. They didn't want to be anywhere near God. They knew they had offended him by breaking his command. So they hid.

It was really a foolish thing to do. How can you hide from God in the garden that he himself had created? He knew every tree and bush that grew there. He was going to find them whether they wanted it or not. Yet even after God finds Adam, Adam continues to try to hid. No longer is he hiding in a physical sense. Rather, he tries to hide his sin from God. He does this by trying to pass the blame. Many people think that Adam was trying to pass the blame on to Eve. But if you look at his words closely, who is he really blaming? He said to God, "*The woman **you** put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.*" Adam is actually trying to blame God for his own failure. This is very foolish. Adam had the freedom to choose whether or not to eat. He had no one to blame but himself. His correct response would have been, "I have sinned against you, Lord. Have mercy on me." Eve did not do any better. She also tried to escape the reality of her sinfulness by blaming the serpent for deceiving her. In terms of a contest, I guess we'd have to say that Adam and Eve were both losing at this point. And their prospects of turning things around and starting to win were dismal, at best.

But before we come down to hard on Adam and Eve, we need to first see our place in this contest. We, too, struggle against the devil. And as we have inherited the same sinful nature from our original parents, Adam and Eve, we also often lose that struggle. We are deceived by the serpent. We fall into temptation. We sin. And what should we do about it? The first thing is to acknowledge this fact. There is a part of us that wants to do the same thing Adam and Eve did and try to hide our sin from those around us and, ultimately, from God. We want to make excuses for our words and actions. We want to lie and deny that they ever happened in the first place. When we try to do this, however, we are acting just as foolish as Adam and Eve in the garden. We cannot ultimately win the victory if we do not begin by confessing our sin and admitting how completely we have lost by our own power and strength. We have the opportunity to do this, as a group, week after week as we publicly confess our sin in worship. I don't know if it is a habit of yours or not, but it would not be a bad idea to take some time before that part of the service to privately enumerate your sins and have them in mind as you confess to God that you are a sinner. And this is not your only opportunity to confess sins. You can do this privately every day as part of your prayer life. For sins that are especially troubling to you, it might be good to confess them to your pastor or to a fellow Christian. Simply confessing your sin, however, does not give you a victory over the devil. No, that victory comes in a different way. It's the way God showed to Adam and Eve after their initial defeat in the garden.

It's interesting how God turns to address the serpent after Adam and Eve offer their weak excuses to him. It's as though God is showing them how this contest is going to be won. It's not going to be about them or their power and might. This is completely out of their hands. This is between God and Satan. God is the one who will win the victory for them. He gives them the first promise of this victory as he boldly says to the serpent: "*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.*" The Lord spoke of the fact that from that day

forward there was going to be a constant battle being waged in this world. There would be hostility between the followers of the Lord and the followers of Satan. This contest would reach its climax in the fight between the One who is spoken of at the end of the verse and the devil. *He* will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

During the season of Lent, we saw this contest being waged. We saw Satan strike at Jesus' heel as he tempted him in the wilderness and tormented him throughout his ministry. We saw the followers of Satan mock and ridicule Jesus time and time again. We saw Satan's final attempt to win in Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. Throughout all of these events, Jesus was at the same time crushing the old snake's head. He never gave in to the devil's temptations or believed his lies. Yes, he suffered and died. It was not as a sign of defeat, however. Rather, it was a sign of his victory over sin, death and the devil. He took upon himself the world's sins and did what Adam and Eve were powerless to do—what you and I are powerless to do—he came out victorious. He claimed that victory in his triumphant resurrection from the dead and ascension to God's right hand.

We are able to claim that victory for ourselves by putting our trust in Christ as our Savior from sin and hope of eternal life. We recognize that we cannot “crush a snake” by ourselves when we confess our sinfulness to God. We realize that our only path to victory is paved with Christ's blood shed for us. It is only by clinging to him that we can ultimately triumph. We hear that triumph in the absolution when we hear the words, “Your sins are forgiven.” What a great victory! This victory gives us confidence to live a life free from fear. We have no need to try to hide our sins from God. We do not have to live in guilt and shame. We can confess our sins and confess our victory through Jesus Christ.

Living a Christian life means appreciating and enjoying that victory. It means not going back to those same old sins, but out of thankfulness to Christ, living for him alone. This doesn't mean it won't be a struggle. It is always a struggle. But it is a struggle, in which we know that we ultimately triumph. We look forward to the day when we can celebrate the eternal victory that Jesus has won with our triumphant hero forever in heaven. **Amen.**

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