

Romans 5:12-19

First Sunday in Lent

Lessons for the Day: Genesis 3:1-21; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11**The Champion**

February 22, 2026

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

“Ladies and gentlemen!”

“In this corner, weighing in at 175 pounds; wearing the gold trunks and a look of innocence on his face: the one who is Cast of Clay, the Living Nephesh, the highpoint of God’s creation, the man that St. Luke refers to as *the son of God*. (Luke 3:38 - ESV); the one, the only: *Adam!*”

“In the far corner, his opponent; whose weight cannot be accurately determined, because it keeps changing, even during the weigh-in; wearing dark red trunks: the one-time guardian cherub; the Ancient Serpent; the Prince of Darkness; The Fallen One; the adversary and accuser sometimes known as *Lucifer*.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, this will be a one round contest, winner take all, for the fate of mankind and for the fate of man’s eternal soul.”

As strange as it may be, that is more or less what happened in the garden of Eden. Oh, I’m sure it would have been a bit easier for Adam if the actual temptation at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil had been announced in such a way, so they would know that the devil’s temptation of Adam and Eve was designed to defeat them and to destroy mankind, the crown of God’s creative glory. Of course, that is not how the devil works. He is sneaky. He hits below the belt. He comes out, pretending to shake hands, but hits you with his best shot.

In our Old Testament lesson today, we see the results of that original contest in the Garden of Eden. Even though God had commanded and warned Adam and Eve: *“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”* (Genesis 2:16-17 - ESV), the devil was able to tempt and overcome Adam and Eve, when they took of the fruit and ate it. In an instant, everything was different. God’s creation, which was perfect and holy, free from death, pain or trouble of any kind, is now a world of sin and death. Man, who was created in the image of God, to be holy like God, lost that holiness. With that loss of holiness, he also lost the life that God created man to enjoy with Him. Now pain and sorrow would be mankind’s lot. Work would become drudgery. Childbirth would be difficult. Relationships would be strained. And it would all end the same way: in death.

If that contest in the garden were the be-all and the end-all of all things, then we might as well go home today, because I would have nothing to tell you. I would have no hope to offer you. We would all be done for. Thankfully, there was a rematch, that God had planned for us—and the results were far different. Paul tells us: *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.* This is our hope, our victory, and our life. We have a champion, and in that champion, we share the victory of life and salvation, no matter how hard the devil may still strive against us.

In our text today, St. Paul makes a comparison between Adam and Jesus. This may even come as a bit of a shock, but Paul refers to Adam as *a type of the one who was to come*. Paul speaks of Adam as a Christ-like figure in several ways. First,

Adam, like Jesus in our Gospel lesson today, had to do battle with the devil. Secondly, Paul will point out that what the first Adam does will affect all mankind. He says: ***Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam.*** Once sin is in the world, it affects all of Adam's descendants, even if they didn't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Earlier in his Epistle to the Romans, Paul is led by the Spirit to tell us what God says in many ways in Holy Scripture: ***“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”*** (Romans 3:10-12 - ESV)

That was the result of that 'winner take all' bout in the garden of Eden. The things that Adam did against God's will and the things he didn't do in obedience to God have touched us all, although we are not without excuse for our own sinfulness. Adam's disobedience brought forth sin and death and judgement for all mankind. Now, if you are tempted to say that it isn't fair that we are held accountable for what Adam did or didn't do, look at how well practised we have become at sinning! Among many of our members, curling is the Olympic sport that draws the most attention. We used to think of curling as a rather gentle, polite and courteous sport. Yet this year there has been a fair bit of curling controversy, with accusations of cheating levelled at the Canadian teams. There were also angry outbursts, and language was anything but courteous and gentle. Canadian vice-skip, Marc Kennedy said. "when you get called out, my instinct was to be a little bit of a bulldog and come after Oskar for it. That's human nature for me." Did you catch that? It's human nature. Sin manifests itself in so many ways.

Sin may reveal itself in big ways: in the drug pushers or murderers or pornographers. Sin is also evident in the small things: in the lies we tell one another; in the selfish attitudes we show to one another; in the ways that we hurt one another; in the simple things we do that we hope and pray no one else will ever discover. The problem is that it doesn't matter how big or how small your sin is, it still flows from the defeat of Adam and it brings forth the same consequences and judgement from God: the eternal death of hell.

And, try as hard as we like, we can't get rid of our sin. After all, we have to remember who we are fighting against. Paul tells us in another of his Epistles: ***Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*** (Ephesians 6:11-12 - ESV) Peter warns us: ***Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*** (1 Peter 5:8 - ESV) We are fighting out of our weight-class. We haven't the strength, the power, the training to overcome the devil.

Thankfully, Paul makes it clear that we have a champion, someone who does fight the battle for us. In the ancient world a champion was designated as a representative of an entire army. He in turn fought against the opposing army's champion. The defeat or victory of this one individual counted as the defeat or victory of the entire army. The historic, One-year series of lessons for this First Sunday in Lent has an alternate reading for the Old Testament lesson. It is the account of David's struggle with Goliath. Goliath was the champion of the Philistines. David was the unlikely, untested champion of Israel. He was just a boy, going against a much larger, stronger and trained opponent. But David wasn't the real champion. He knew that the Lord was the Champion, who would fight for his people. He even told Goliath: ***“You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.*** (1 Samuel 17:45-46 - ESV)

God is our champion, too. In Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth has come down to win the fight for us. Luther said that so well in that wonderful hymn: ***With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected; But for us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected. Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, Of Sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God; He holds the field forever.*** (LSB 656, st. 2) The real contest for the souls of men did not take place in the Garden of Eden, but on the cross. As terrible as Adam's sin was, and as horrible as the consequences are for all of mankind, they are nothing compared to what we have in the second Adam, in the Champion, who wins the battle for us. Paul tells us: ***“But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.”*** (Romans 5:15, ESV) Yes, death came to all because of one man's sin. But Christ brings life as He bears all sin for us. Christ dies on that horrible cross, and it seems as if the devil has once again won the victory. But the devil never saw Easter Sunday coming. He never expected the glory of the resurrection. In His sacrifice for us, Christ paid the price for sins. In His resurrection, He defeated sin, death and the devil. Now, all who believe in Him

are partakers of His victory. Baptized into Christ, we are one with Christ, and therefore He is our champion. When we come together at His table, we share in His victory, as we share in Him, who is the Champion.

Ladies and gentlemen: in this corner, clothed in white, weighing in at the same 175 pounds of Adam, is the Living Word, the Crucified, Yet Living One; Emmanuel—*God With Us!* In the opposing corner is that same old adversary—***“that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world”*** (Revelation 12:9, ESV) Ladies and gentlemen, this will be a one round contest, winner take all, for the fate of mankind, and for the eternal salvation of all who will believe. This, dear people, is the only bout that matters. Rejoice, for this time the outcome is different. Sin is not the winner. Satan is not the champion. Jesus Christ is the Champion of the world, and the One who is our life and our righteousness. Amen.