

Matthew 4:1-11

The battle began in a garden. It continued in a wilderness. And it ended at the cross with the words, “*It is finished!*” Then why are we struggling today? Doesn’t the devil know that he is defeated? “*The whole world lies in (his) power.*” Scripture says this. But there is one over whom he has no power. The one who defeated him. Jesus.

The deadly coronavirus is becoming pandemic. Thousands have died, and who knows how many more will die. There is no known cure for it. People everywhere are terrified. If an antidote is discovered, it will be sought after by people around the globe. The world seems to lie in the power of the coronavirus. But it doesn’t. It lies in the power of the devil. He is much more deadly than the coronavirus. He can kill both body and soul in hell.

But there is an antidote for the devil. Adam and Eve did not make use of it in the Garden. But in the wilderness, Jesus did. The antidote is the Word of God which, writes St. James, “*is able to save your souls.*”

Now you tell me, if there was an antidote for the coronavirus, and you were infected, would you seek that antidote? Then why would we not seek the antidote for the evil one? If a Christian, writes Luther, does not make use of God’s Word, he is done for. Satan is defeated. But only for those who arm themselves with God’s Word. For then they arm themselves in Christ.

The devil refuses to accept defeat. His head was indeed crushed by Jesus on the cross. Yet there is still deadly poison in his fangs. I remind you of a true story out of Oklahoma. Years ago, a woman’s husband came home drunk every night. Oftentimes he would beat her in a drunken rage. One day she killed a rattlesnake out by the woodpile, cutting off its head. Her husband came home drunk that night, beat her, and went back outside. But he had taken off his shoes while in the house. The next morning, she found him dead next to the woodpile. He had unknowingly stepped into the mouth of the snake, and the poison, still in its fangs, killed him.

We are just like that man when we step away from the Word of God into temptation. If I think I can casually come to the house of God only when it’s convenient for me, my foot is poised over the serpent’s fangs. If I think I can play around with pornography, and engage in sexual sin – sex outside of marriage – Satan’s fangs are piercing me. If I think I can be angry with my brother or sister in Christ, refusing to forgive and reconcile, the Tempter’s poison has infected me.

Now I know how we think. “Well, I’m a Christian. I have faith. So, I’ll be okay.” Luther points out that when people say, “I am a Christian,” these words alone do not frighten the devil. It would be somewhat comparable to saying, “I’m an American citizen. I believe in my country. So the coronavirus cannot infect me and kill me.” This would be especially foolish if there was an antidote for the virus. Just being aware of the antidote would do no good. One would have to make use of it to be saved from the virus.

Satan is frightened, however, when someone says, “I am baptized into Christ.” This confession of faith causes him to flee. This confession is not just being aware of the antidote but makes full use of it. In baptism you are united to Christ Jesus. He is the living Word of God. He is the

antidote to Satan's poison. Jesus has overcome and defeated the devil. Just being aware of Jesus is not enough. You need Him, as the antidote, to be a part of you.

This is what your baptism does. Through baptism, He who is the living Word of God, abides in you, and so you, in Christ, have overcome and defeated the devil. "*Greater is He (Christ) who is in you,*" writes St. John, "*than he (Satan) who is in the world.*"

The antidote lies before you on the altar. This is Jesus' body and blood for you in His own Sacrament. Have you fallen into temptation? Does Satan have his fangs in you? You are not able to drive him away. Jesus, in the wilderness, did drive him away. Here is Jesus for you. The same body which overcame the devil by hanging from a cross. The same blood which was poured out at the cross for the forgiveness of sins. You need this antidote. You need Jesus. You need His forgiveness.

Friend, it's yours. Whatever sin has entangled you, Jesus declares that sin to be forgiven. You, no matter how often you have stepped away from the Word of God into temptation, you are forgiven. Each and every one of you is forgiven. "The blood of Jesus cleanses you of all sin." Scripture proclaims this truth, and this truth is for you.

And since this is true, so also is this true: keep your foot out of the Tempter's mouth. Arm yourself diligently with the Word of God. "*I do not condemn you,*" are Jesus' own words, "*Now go and sin no more.*"

When you are tempted, and as cunning as Satan is, he disguises his temptations well, drive him away in the only way you can. You are baptized into Christ. You have the antidote, for He has you. Standing in the water of your baptism, Jesus abiding in you, the devil has no choice but to flee. Amen.