

## BUT WHAT ABOUT SECOND ADAM?

A sermon on Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 and Matthew 4:1-11

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts  
be acceptable in thy sight oh Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.*

In the first of the Lord of the Rings movies, we meet people known as hobbits,  
short folk living simple unassuming lives,

### The second Breakfast Club



and it is said that their greatest love is food.

When a few of these hobbits begin their adventure, life changes.

When told that they already had breakfast,

one of them asks, “But what about second breakfast?”

only to discover that they wouldn’t be stopping for second breakfast,  
elevensies, and so many of the other hobbitish snacking occasions.

We might view the season of Lent as a similar “questing” mode of existence,  
to reprioritize relationship with God,

and to set aside whatever isn’t conducive to spiritual growth, whatever that is for you.

For the hobbits, the goal of the quest wasn’t about how many second breakfasts could be foregone,  
but to destroy the Dark Lord Sauron; to banish evil from Middle Earth.

This is a helpful frame in which to think about our scripture readings today as we enter into our own  
Lent Quests, so keep it in mind.

The Fall of Adam and Eve and the Lack-of-a-Fall in Jesus’ Temptation in the wilderness  
have long been paired and the early Church is full of references to Jesus as the Second Adam.

I like to imagine Satan approaching Jesus with the swaggering thought that

since already overcame Adam, that he has this under control,

only to meet Jesus’ reply “Oh, but what about Second Adam?”

Just like for the Hobbits, the rules of the game are about to change.

Humanity’s first test came in paradise — and we fell.

Humanity’s second test comes in a wasteland — and Christ stands.

Matthew’s gospel tells us that Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness.

Now, the “up” part *is* geographical,

in that the Judean wilderness is at a higher elevation than the Jordan River valley,

but consider that it just might suggest something *more*.

What if, in specifying “up,” Matthew is telling us something about spiritual geography.

Sometimes we consider desert places, places of hardship and need,

as low places, because it makes you feel “low.”

## BUT WHAT ABOUT SECOND ADAM?



That's not the sort of thing that Matthew is meaning,  
nor is it really what Lent is about even now.

Lent is Not descent. Quite the opposite.

Lent is about striving to rise spiritually,  
to climb your own mountain  
out of whatever mirey bog you might find yourself in.

That's where repentance STARTS -

John baptized people to start them on their journey in the Jordan,  
at this lower level,

but Jesus does not stay there, but is led "up," setting the model for us to follow.  
He is led up, not to comfort and ease, but to testing and temptation and wilderness.  
But the wilderness becomes, in Christ, a new Eden.

Not because it is comfortable — but because it is filled with obedience.

And here in the wilderness, we hear echoes of what was heard in the Garden of Eden.  
The tempter, the devil, the serpent, is back.

When we first meet this fugure, back in Genesis,  
he is in this same trickster role, as he tempts Eve,  
asking "Did God really say..."

The Greek version (Septuagint) says something more like "Why is it that God said...?"  
It is not a command to rebel, but a question that distorts.

A question that reframes the loving boundaries God had given them.

It is a question that implies that God is answerable to our limited human reason,  
it suggests that we ought to understand,  
and that if we don't, that maybe we ought not obey.

It is a question that says that they know *better* than God.



Many early Church Fathers (Clement of Alexandria, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyon, Gregory of Nazianzus) wrote about Adam and Eve as children in the Garden. Here's what Irenaeus has to say:

*...in as much as [Adam and Eve] had come into being more recently, they are infants, and, in as much as they are infants, they are unaccustomed to and unpracticed in perfect discipline. A mother can offer adult food to an infant, but the infant cannot yet digest food suitable for someone older. Similarly God, for his part, could have granted perfection to humankind from the beginning, but humankind, being in its infancy, would not have been able to sustain it."*

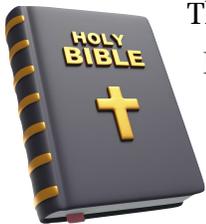
As much as young children might argue the point, they don't know better than God.

## BUT WHAT ABOUT SECOND ADAM?

In this view, God put that tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden for a reason, intending that Adam and Eve one day enjoy that fruit. But they had to learn obedience first, and that their actions have consequences.

But the very young do not always do as they are told. Eve enters into the conversation, accepts the framing presented to her, and eats of the forbidden fruit. Adam joins her and does likewise.

Now listen to Jesus in the wilderness.



Three times the tempter comes. Three times Jesus answers the same way:

Γέγραπται. It is written. It stands written.

This is a perfect tense verb, meaning “It has been written, and it remains written.” It stands firm.

In Genesis, humanity falls by entertaining a distorted word about God.

In the Gospel, the devil finds the trick doesn’t work so well against the incarnate Word of God.

In this second round, the Tempter uses a similar distortion of truth, recognizing Jesus as the Son of God, but framing it in a way that gives two options, either “prove” that he *is* the Son of God, by disobedience to the Father, by taking things into his own hands apart from the Father.

Or, if he doesn’t, the devil suggests that then He must not *actually* be the Son of God.

But Jesus doesn’t take the bait. He doesn’t get into a drawn out argument.

He dismisses the temptations through reference to sacred scripture.



Let’s look quickly at Jesus’ responses. They all come from the book of Deuteronomy.

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3) This was originally in reference to the Manna and a command to remember that God provides.

“Thou shalt not put the Lord thy God to the test, as you tested Him in the place of temptation” (Deuteronomy 6:16) This again recalls all the Israelites’ grumbling in the wilderness during the Exodus. In this place of temptation Jesus is in, He is remembering the lesson to trust God.

“Honor the Lord your God, worship only him, and make your promises in his name alone.” (Deuteronomy 6:13). This precludes the devil’s suggestion that he bow down and worship him.

It is at this point Jesus gives the command, “Begone, Satan” and lo and behold, he is gone.

Because there is one voice even the devil must obey,

further proving the point of the absurdity of worshiping a being so far beneath Him.

## BUT WHAT ABOUT SECOND ADAM?

Compare how the devil quotes Scripture — with highly selective editing.

He quotes Psalm 91, “For he hath given his angels charge over thee; to keep thee in all thy ways.

In their hands they shall bear thee up: lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

He conveniently doesn't mention the line that comes directly after that:

“Thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk:

and thou shalt trample under foot the lion and the dragon.”

This line is itself a reference to Genesis 3:15, in which God tells the serpent, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for his heel.”

The image of crushing the head of a serpent underfoot, slaying the dragon if you will, is a potent one. St. Jerome comments,

“concerning his being trampled underfoot, [the devil] is silent like an artful dodger.”

But the omission isn't lost on those familiar with the Psalms.

It is no accident that this confrontation happens in a wilderness.

Genesis begins in a garden — lush, watered, abundant.

Jesus begins his ministry in a desert — dry, empty, severe.

And yet, paradoxically, the wilderness becomes the place of renewal.

In a different wilderness, the Egyptian desert of the 4<sup>th</sup> century,

a hermit monk by the name of Evagrius developed this into a method he called *Antirrhētikos*, that is “Talking Back.” or “How Give Satan Some Sass”

The format is simple enough - he outlines different problematic thoughts, thoughts having been distorted by the devil, twisted into temptation, which he then in turn provides a scriptural verse that can do the “talking back,” so one doesn't get caught in the cycle of entertaining such thoughts, accepting them, and acting on them.

It doesn't suppress thoughts,

but diffuses them in ways that anticipate modern techniques of psychotherapy blending methods Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.

But I don't want to suggest *too* great a parallel here,

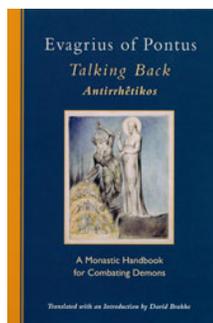
because there are important differences, in worldview, and especially in the goals.

Evagrius' system is to bring one to “purity of heart”

and a state of freedom from disordered passions

(Gluttony, Lust, Greed, Anger, Despair, Apathy, Vainglory, Pride).

A state of freedom in which one can have fuller experiences God.



## BUT WHAT ABOUT SECOND ADAM?

While Christ was tempted by what was within His power to do, but beyond ours,  
Evagrius' thoughts are often all too familiar:  
Fantasies of admiration, replaying of old injustices, fixations that breed frustration,  
justifications for vice couched in moral language, rationalization of vice stemming from fear,  
pride arising from virtue, despair cloaked as contrition...

But the answers are the same. It is written.  
Lent invites us to ask: which voices are we rehearsing?  
Do we listen to "did God really say" — or the "it is written"  
The serpent's suspicion — or the Son's trust?

This Quest of Lent is not about spiritual heroics, certainly not for their own sake.  
It is about God.  
It is about learning to answer the serpent's whisper with Christ's words.  
As we enter Lent, let us remember:  
our hope does not rest in Adam's fragile obedience, nor in our own.  
It rests in the steadfast obedience of the Christ our Lord.  
He has entered the wilderness and answered the tempter as the Second Adam.  
We are not left alone in the wilderness, we are led up to stand with Christ.

*Now to the One who by the power at work within us  
is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or imagine,  
to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus  
to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*