

INVOCABIT / THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Text: Genesis 3:1-21; St. Matthew 4:1-11

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

As I ponder the Gospel text before us today, it is hard for me to imagine the gross arrogance of Satan that he, a creature created, should seek to tempt God, the Creator and doubly so, since he only offers to the One who is LORD of all, that which already belongs to Him. Still, such are the ways of Satan, the father of all lies. He is very subtle. Satan twists the Word of God to his own agenda in an attempt to deceive the Word made flesh. But the Word made flesh, CHRIST JESUS, the second and greater Adam, does not fall for the devil's scheme, He does not take the bait, as did the first Adam. The temptation of the first Adam resulted in the fall of Adam, along with all humanity, into sin and death. The temptation of CHRIST resulted in the fall of Satan and the rescue of humanity from sin and death.

We should be clear, temptation itself is not sin. JESUS was tempted in every way as are we tempted, yet He remained without sin. To be tempted is to be left alone in the presence of the devil with nothing to grasp hold of for strength but the Word of God. It is Adam and Eve standing before the serpent in Eden. It is Israel in the desert. It is King David on the rooftop. It is our LORD JESUS in the wilderness. It is CHRIST in the Garden of Gethsemane, and again, CHRIST on the Cross, forsaken by God and man, with nothing to cling to but the bare Word of God.

To be tempted is to pray with the psalmist from the pit: *“Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications.”* Being tempted is to be in a position that leaves one with two options: to abandon the Word of God in favor of the easy, and seemingly more attractive or comfortable way, or to cling to the Word of God believing that your very being depends on it.

However, temptation is not simply a matter of choosing between good and evil. Such a choice implies that there is a neutral position between good and evil. There is not. The knowledge of good and evil is found in but a single fruit growing on a single tree. Good and evil are not two opposite things, but two opposite ways of experiencing the gifts of God.

Good is the gift of God used according to the will of God. Evil is the gift of God used against the will of God and God Himself. To be tempted is to be presented with the

awful opportunity not to be who you are meant to be in relation to God. Adam and Eve were tempted not to be the image of God. JESUS was tempted not to be the Son of God. We are tempted not to be the baptized, adopted, children of God.

Temptation began in the Garden, in the abundance of Paradise. In the middle of the garden were two trees that defined the relationship between God and man—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It was in this paradise, that God placed Adam and Eve. They were alive with the life of God, and knew only good, for they were in the image of God. Adam and Eve had everything because God, in His love, had placed everything under their dominion. Yet, this was not enough for them. It was not enough for Adam and Eve to be created in the image of God with dominion over all things in paradise. They wanted even more; they wanted to be gods themselves, and so when they could have chosen life, they instead, chose death.

This was the freedom Adam and Eve were created into. Yes, God had given our first parents freedom, but it was freedom with a boundary, a line drawn by the Word of God. Freedom without boundaries is, in the end, no freedom at all. This line marked the boundary between God and those created in the image of God; between the Creator and the pinnacle of His creation—man.

You see, every tree in the garden was given to man for food to preserve his life; every tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That was man's freedom. He was free to eat of any tree in the garden but one. That was man's limit. This limit kept God and His Word at the center of man's life. For man to reach his hand over that boundary line and eat the forbidden food was to reach into the middle, the place of knowledge, of life and death, the place that only God may occupy. For man to reach his hand over that line was an attempt to usurp God's place, to be a god in place of God, to push God out from the middle of life, to grab for what was not given. It meant to give up the *"image of God"* to become merely *"like God."* So it goes, even down to today.

Indeed, this is our temptation. We are tempted to trespass the boundary of God's Word and exercise our freedom without limits; to push God from the middle of life and to put ourselves there; to draw life and knowledge from ourselves and our experiences instead of from God; to live as if God did not matter and as if we mattered most.

To live without God at the center of our lives would seem to our corrupt hearts to be the height of freedom. Yet this kind of freedom means simply that you have nothing left to lose. To live without God in the middle is only death disguised as life. So, you see, temptation is a matter of life and death, not good and evil.

Temptation began with an assault on God's Word. *"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"* Perhaps Adam and Eve had misunderstood or misheard. Such a limit did not sound like God. How could God, who is good, God, who is pure love, impose limits on their freedom? Such a limit could not, in any way, be fair. Why would God have put a forbidden tree there in the first place? In the very middle of the garden, of all places. But I ask you? Who is Satan, indeed, who are we to question the will and mind of God?

"Has God indeed said?" This is a doctrinal question from a very religious serpent. With this question comes the seed of all speculative theology and religious philosophy, even down to this very day. It is the question that lies behind all the disagreements in Christendom. It is the same question that, when answered according to our sinful flesh, allows divorce, abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, open communion, women pastors, homosexual priests, and so-called gender reassignment. It is the same question that would prevent us from claiming the truth of the doctrines of the Christian Church, and dare I say it, therefore the Lutheran Church.

"Has God indeed said?" With this question, Eve was invited to step back and become a dispassionate critic of God's Word. She was invited to reach into the gray matter between her ears, to speculate about God, to judge God and His Word, to draw conclusions about God apart from His Word, and to use her opinion and experience of God against God's Word. And if her experience or opinions conflict with God's Word, then perhaps God's Word is wrong. After all, how could something that feels so right, be so wrong? With this question, Eve was on her way to what Martin Luther calls *"schwaermeri,"* his word for religious enthusiasm which is nothing more than a faith fashioned by personal religious opinions and emotional experience instead of God's Word.

"Has God indeed said?" This religious question seeks to drive a wedge between God who speaks His Word, and man who lives by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. This religious question is posed to us and by us all the time. Has God indeed said, *"Remember the Sabbath," "Honor your parents," "Do not murder," "Do not commit adultery," "Do not steal, lie, cheat, slander, covet?"* Did he really say that to us? Perhaps such commandments do not apply to our modern, enlightened situation.

Therefore, has God indeed said, *"Teach them to observe all things I have commanded you?"* Did He really say, *"This is my Body; this is my Blood"* or did He mean something else? Has God indeed said, *"The sins you forgive are forgiven?"* Has God indeed said, *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved?"* Has God indeed said that He forgives sin unconditionally, that CHRIST has died and been raised for us, did He really say that we need no works in order to receive His mercy? *"Has God indeed said?"*

God created Adam and Eve to be in His image. To be the *“image of God”* is to be bound to God’s Word and to draw your life from God alone. To be simply *“like God”* is to be bound to your own experience of good and evil and to draw your life from yourself, from your own experience, making your own judgments separate from the Word of God. But as much as man might try, he cannot *“be God.”*

Adam exchanged the *“image of God”* to be *“like God.”* We are in Adam and Adam is in us. We are conceived and born in the image of Adam. That means we too are *“like God”* instead of the *“image of God.”* Being *“like God,”* knowing good and evil apart from God, we are in competition with God. God, by our very nature, is our enemy. We judge God. We judge His Word. We transgress His boundaries. We hate His limits. We try to push Him from the middle of our lives. We grab for knowledge and we die, for the weight of being *“like God”* crushes us to death. Only God can be God for us. To have to live with being *“like God”* means our death.

JESUS is different. JESUS was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He is a second Adam, a new man. He was not made from the dust, as the first Adam was, but was born of a woman. JESUS is the promised offspring of Eve, the Virgin’s Son, and so He is born bone of Adam’s bone and flesh of Adam’s flesh.

Yet, JESUS is not Adam’s son; He is God’s SON. JESUS is not *“like God,”* as Adam had become; that was a distortion of our humanity. JESUS is God! He is both God and the image of God, true God, and true man.

CHRIST JESUS did not grasp for things forbidden to Him. Instead, He gave up what was rightfully His as St. Paul tells us, *“Let this mind be in you which was also in CHRIST JESUS, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the Cross.”* JESUS Himself, tells us, *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head.”*

Instead of battling Satan outside the Word of His FATHER, instead of adding to or subtracting from the Word, instead of doubting and questioning the Word of His FATHER, instead of relying on His own experience and emotions, JESUS speaks the pure Word of God with all its power. JESUS would not give up the *“image of God”* to simply show that He was *“like God.”* JESUS meets every assault of Satan with the Words that issue forth from the mouth of God.

When JESUS answers the devil's taunts and temptations with the Words, "*It is written,*" He is telling Satan that what God has written stands forever. He defeats the devil with "*the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.*" JESUS, the second Adam, accomplishes, what the first Adam could not do; He defeats Satan by placing His trust firmly in the Word of God.

It is that same Word of God that gives life to us. It is the Word in the waters of Holy Baptism that pour life over us and into us, returning to us the image of God as He places His Name on us through adoption as His children. It is this water that we are figuratively called to return to every day of our lives, drowning the old Adam and emerging as new creations in CHRIST JESUS.

This Word of God is what makes simple bread and wine the Sacrament of the Altar where we find the Word made flesh—JESUS CHRIST—in, with, and under the bread and wine creating, sustaining, and strengthening our faith and forgiving our sins.

It is the same Word of God, preached into your ears and given to you in blessed Holy Absolution, that allows you to stand up to the attacks of your flesh, of the world, and of Satan.

In Adam, all sinned and died. But in CHRIST, the second Adam, all are perfected, justified, and live. JESUS has born our human flesh into temptation, and He has triumphed. This does not mean that we will not suffer temptation. We will, and that you can count on. For we live in the wilderness of this world, and we will be tempted. The forty days of Lent remind us of this reality. The Christian life is lived nailed to the Cross of CHRIST. It is a life of suffering and temptation. Yet, you do not live this life alone. You live in CHRIST and CHRIST lives in you.

Yes, in this life temptations come. The old Adam in us must die. CHRIST, the new Adam in us, must rise. Our comfort, our strength in every temptation are that JESUS has already triumphed over temptation in our place, and in that triumph He proclaims the reality of His sacrifice for us in the words, "*I have died and rose again to forgive you all your sins.*"

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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