

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.

He was just trying to be nice. He was just trying to offer some friendly advice and counsel when he saw that Adam and Eve had been deceived by God. After all, if God truly loved them, why would He withhold anything from them? Why would He not want their eyes opened? Why would He not want them to be like God? Who could love and worship a God like that? After all, *“Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?”*

“How shameful, that God, who presents Himself as being so holier than thou, should cheat you. I would never do that to you. God’s holding out on you. Go ahead, eat the fruit—look how inviting it appears. Do you not want to know good from evil? You will not surely die. In fact, you will be like God. Bow down and worship me.” But I have a question for you: If Satan was just trying to help then why did Adam and Eve die?

Then there was JESUS all alone in the desert, dragged out there by the HOLY SPIRIT no less. He was hungry and the devil just offered a little suggestion. *“If You are the SON of God, command that these stones become bread.”* He was trying to be helpful. After all, JESUS had fasted for forty days. He needed to eat. Why not change the stones into bread? It would be such a little thing for JESUS if He truly is the SON of God. What problem could there be with making a little bread to feed the hungry? If He is truly the SON of God, such a tiny miracle should be no problem at all for Him. He made manna fall from heaven, did He not? He fed the Israelites in the desert with that manna for forty years. He even created all of creation from nothing. What harm could there be in making a little bread? Just as he did with Adam and Eve, Satan was just trying to be helpful, right?

Well, he certainly would have you think so. The devil wanted nothing more than for JESUS, the Second Adam, to worship Him. Nothing would please Satan more than if JESUS should follow the Israelites into the sin of idolatry. Satan wants to be God and if he could not tempt JESUS into worshipping Him and betraying His FATHER, then he would set about trying to kill Him.

But, JESUS is not like Adam. He is not like Israel. He is not like you and me. He resisted the tempter. He overcame the deceiver. He did not fail and fall, but this would not be the last temptation of CHRIST.

What the Devil did to Adam and Eve, what He did to God's chosen people, the nation of Israel, but what he could not do in the desert to JESUS, he still tries to do in the Church today. He wants to stop the work of the Church. He peddles false doctrine under the guise of being nice. The Devil wants you to believe that it is nicer to be tolerant of others and their aberrant theology and practice than to hold fast to the Truth of the Word of God. He wants you to believe that it is mean and unloving to stand firmly on the Scriptures. He wants you to worry that the absolute truth might offend someone.

Satan prefers that you accept false doctrine rather than hurt someone's feelings. He wants you to think it is more loving to let someone perish in false belief, rather than to speak the Truth to them in love. He does not want you to read the Bible. He does not want you to know the Truth. He wants you to be angry at anyone who fervently stands up for and proclaims the Truth. He wants to stop the Gospel from being proclaimed to the ends of the earth. He wants you to believe that you can choose for yourself what to believe, to decide for yourself what you think is true and right, apart from God's Word. Then you would be like God, would you not? But what the Devil offers is a deadly illusion.

Do not be fooled. Satan is a predator, and his prey is mankind. He prowls around like a roaring lion searching for someone to devour. He knows your weaknesses and uses them to ensnare you. He is a master of deceit. His silken tongue speaks sweet lies and half-truths. He sings the siren song of earthly pleasure and illicit desires. He knows what tempts you because he knows you better than you know yourself. He plays to your vanity and pride, your greed and your selfishness, your secret lusts and perversions. His one desire is to consume your soul by destroying your faith and separating you from God.

Beware, O Christian. Be on your guard, O descendent of Adam. Satan lays in wait for you in the desert. Like a lion stalking his next meal, He is patient. He sniffs the air for the scent of sinful cravings and unbelief. He looks for the one who would stand separate from the flock pursuing his own way, trusting in his own desires and feelings. He has an uncanny ability to ferret out the weak and the vulnerable. He looks for the sick and the doubting. He looks for you.

Satan looks for you because he knows that you are bone of Adam's bone and flesh of Adam's flesh. He knows that every son and daughter of Adam inherited Adam's sin and suffers from Adam's weakness. He knows that if left on your own, the image of God does not mean all that much to you. Satan knows that you do not love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. He knows that you do not love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.

Satan also hunts you because he knows that in your hour of need and despair, you will first look everywhere else before you turn to God, and Satan plans to be there, Johnny on the spot, with an offer he hopes you cannot refuse. He is always ready to soothe your sinful flesh and promises to give to you what your heart truly desires. He knows that all too often you rely only on what you can see or what think you know.

But the devil is a liar and the father of all lies. Do not listen to him. Rather, live on every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Do not eat of the fruit that the devil offers; it is nothing more than a deadly poison for your eternal soul. Do not tempt God to leave you to yourself, to the world, and Satan, but worship the LORD, your God, and serve Him and Him alone.

Remember, there is another, a greater, a second Adam. He too, was tempted in the wilderness that is this world. Born into this veil of sin, death, and tears, He too, is bone of Adam's bone and flesh of Adam's flesh, but there is a difference—Adam is not His FATHER.

JESUS suffered every temptation you have suffered or ever will suffer, but He did not fail. He did not fall. The beast did not consume him. When confronted by Satan, He did not hide behind His Bride while the serpent struck his death blows. He did not stand by and watch her die.

No, this second Adam, JESUS the CHRIST, the SON of the living God, and Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, did not submit to His tempter; He overcame him. He suffered the blows that should have been ours. He suffered the death that was truly ours to die. He faced down that serpent, Satan, even as He was deserted and forsaken by His closest friends, and even by God the FATHER Himself. JESUS lived a sinless life and was without blame in the eyes of God. Still, He submitted Himself to the will of His FATHER and allowed Satan to do to Him all the things that every demon desires to do to you.

There, on Calvary, while Satan and the hosts of hell danced unseen around the foot of the Cross, JESUS was tempted for the last time. The cries of the people echoed Satan's question of JESUS in the desert: *"If You are the SON of God, come down from the cross."* But what was JESUS' reply? *"FATHER, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."* Such is the hunger and thirst of JESUS. He hungered for your salvation and He thirsted for your deliverance from sin, Satan, and the grave. Such is our SAVIOR's love.

So JESUS did what Adam and Israel could not. He did what we cannot do. He resisted. He overcame. He triumphs over temptation and does not give in to sin. He is victorious and shares with you the fruits of His victory. There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood, but the sacrifice is complete. All righteousness has been fulfilled.

It is finished. The grace of God is yours, free and unmerited. This is the Word of God and by it, you will live.

It is this Word that is joined with simple bread and wine so that we may partake of the Body and Blood of JESUS. This is the means by which God feeds our souls and strengthens our weak faith, giving us the strength to meet the onslaughts of Satan, resist his temptations, and find forgiveness when we fail. *“For man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* Out of the mouth of God comes His Word and into your mouth He gives it to you in His own Body and Blood.

So, now we have come to this day. We are here to worship the LORD our God. Here, we are served by Him so that we might serve Him by serving one another. Therefore, *“Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* Come to the throne of grace and hear your SAVIOR, JESUS say, *“I 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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Rev. Raymond D. Parent II
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church
Crestview, Florida
2/18/24 A✠D