

**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.

*“Has God indeed said...?”* This question may indeed be the most dangerous question in all of human history. This is the question that brought mankind to destruction and caused all creation to be damned.

When first heard, this question seems innocent enough. It simply asks, *“What is truth?”* Yet upon closer examination, one must recognize this question as the very seed of all theological conjecture, skepticism, and religious doubt. Throughout the ages it has been the genesis of all heresy and unbelief. Behind this question lies every disagreement in Christendom.

It is the same question that, when answered according to our sinful flesh, allows some in the Church to support abortion, euthanasia, same sex marriage, open communion, female pastors, homosexual and transgender priests, and so-called gender reassignment. It is the same question that would prevent us from claiming the unqualified and absolute truth of the doctrines of the Christian faith, and (dare I say it?), therefore, the Lutheran Church.

*“Has God indeed said...?”* Or to put this question another way: *“Is this the real meaning of God’s Word?”* But this leads one to another question: *“Is it safe for one to interpret the Word of God with flawed human reason or is there a better way?”*

*“Has God indeed said...?”* This religious question seeks to drive a wedge between our God, who speaks His Word, and man, who is to live by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. This religious question is posed to us, and by us, all the time. Therefore, has God indeed said, *“Honor your parents,” “Do not murder,” “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not steal, lie, cheat, slander, covet?”* Did He really say that to us? And even if He did, perhaps it does not apply to our modern, more enlightened situation; times have changed after all, and we are far more sophisticated than were our ancestors when God handed down these words to Adam and Eve or Moses.

Has God indeed said, *“This is my Body; this is my Blood... for the forgiveness of sin,”* or did He mean something else? Has God indeed said, *“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”* 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; that we are saved by God’s grace through faith alone without any merit or works on the part of a sinner?

*“Has God indeed said?”* With this seemingly innocent question Satan encourages false doctrine under the guise of tolerance. With this question the devil wants you to believe it is

respectful and much more charitable, more compassionate, to be accepting of what others believe, rather than holding fast to the Truth of the Word of God. He wants you to believe it is cold and unfriendly to stand firmly on the Words of Holy Scripture and the doctrines of our faith. He wants you to believe that doing so will harm the growth of the Church. He wants you to worry that the absolute truth might offend someone. But if we do not hold to the teachings of our faith, if we do not hold to the truth of God's Word, what is it then, we are to teach?

*"Has God indeed said?"* In entertaining this question, Satan invites you to take a step back and become a dispassionate and objective critic of God's Word. You are invited to reach into the gray matter between your ears, to speculate about God, to judge God and His Word, to draw conclusions about God apart from His Word, to use your own experience, your own feelings and emotions, as the standard with which you judge God's Word.

Therefore, if your experience conflicts with God's Word, if your feelings contradict God's Truth, well then, perhaps God's Word is wrong; perhaps God's Word is a lie; maybe the Church has it all wrong. *"To thine own self be true!"* After all, how could something that feels so right, be so wrong? Yet, is this not a faith fashioned by little more than one's personal emotional experience or one's personal opinion, rather than the Word of God? Does this not lead to a pantheon of false gods created by individuals searching for a so-called *"personal relationship"* with God?

Yet, our LORD, JESUS has plainly said, *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"* Therefore, one is not to pick and choose what he or she will or will not believe from the Word of God, any more than one may pick and choose which Word of God he or she will honor by keeping it. Thus, does our LORD command His Apostles, and even all pastors down to our age, to teach all things which He has commanded, and that, without embellishment or fluff, but simply His pure Word alone.

Therefore, man is not to live on the bread of his own wisdom, but on every Word that issues forth from the mouth of our good and gracious God. It is, indeed, by the life sustaining Word of God alone that we are fed on the true Bread which comes down from Heaven that we may have life with God. If anyone, therefore, is not fed on the Word of God, there can be no true life in him; indeed, such is impossible, for as the human body cannot live without earthly food, so the soul withers and dies without this heavenly Bread.

Be warned, therefore! Satan is the great deceiver. He wants you to believe that you can choose for yourself what to believe, to decide for yourself what you think is meet, right, and salutary apart from God's Word; to decide for yourself what is true. Then you would be like, well, you would be like God, would you not?

But what the Devil wraps in the shiny paper of tolerance, what he veils with the eye-pleasing bow of friendly accommodation, what he calls compassion, is deadly poison for your soul. Do not eat of that fruit, for in the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.

Therefore, do not be fooled. Satan is a predator, and his prey is all mankind. He prowls around like a roaring lion searching for someone to devour. But it is even more personal than that—his prey is you. You see, the Devil knows your weaknesses and He uses them to ensnare you. As the master of deceit, his silken tongue speaks sweet lies and half-truths. He sings the siren song of tolerance, 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 every perversion. And as if this is not enough, he also plays to your emotions and opinions. His one desire is to consume your soul by destroying your faith, as he, all the while, separates you from God.

Beware, O Christian! Be on your guard, O son and daughter of Adam and Eve! Satan lays in wait for you in the wilderness of sin. Like a lion stalking his next meal, he is patient. He sniffs the air for the scent of sinful cravings and the hint of unbelief. He looks for the ewe who stands separate from the flock, pursuing his own way while trusting in his own feelings and opinions. Like every successful predator Satan has an uncanny ability to spy out the weak and the vulnerable. He looks for the sick and the doubting. In short, He is looking for you.

Satan is looking 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 and Eve inherited their sin and suffer from their weaknesses. He knows that, in truth, the image of God does not mean all that much to you. Satan knows that you do not truly love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. He knows that rather than worship God, you would rather be a god, making your own rules to live by, than living by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

But the devil is a liar and the father of all lies. Do not listen to him! Do not eat of the fruit the devil offers. Do not tempt God to leave you to yourself, to the world, and to Satan, but worship the LORD, your God, and serve 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 vale of sin and pain, tears and death, He too, is bone of Adam's bone and flesh of Adam's flesh, but Adam is not His FATHER. He suffered every temptation you have suffered, or ever will suffer, but He did not fall. He did not fail. He was not consumed by the beast. Unlike the first Adam 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, the second Adam, who is JESUS the CHRIST, did not submit to the deceiver; He overcame him. He suffered the blows that should have been yours. He suffered the death that was truly yours to die. He faced down that serpent, Satan, even as He was deserted and forsaken by His closest friends and ultimately was forsaken 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: *"Has God indeed said... You are the SON of God?" "If You are the SON of God, come down from the Cross."* But what was our LORD's reply? *"FATHER, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."* Such is your SAVIOR's love.

Therefore, JESUS accomplished what Adam and Israel could not. He accomplished what you and I cannot. He resisted. He overcame. He triumphed over temptation and did 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. The Blood of the sacrifice shed on God's holy mountain was that of the SON of God that all righteousness be fulfilled.

Therefore, *"It is finished!"* Completed! The grace of God is yours, free and unmerited. This is the Word of God, this is the Bread of Life, and by it you will live.

It is through this very same Word, joined with simple bread and wine, that we may partake of the Body and Blood of JESUS, the Word made flesh. This is the means by which God feeds your soul and strengthens your weak faith, giving you the strength to meet the onslaughts of Satan, to resist his temptations, and find forgiveness when you fail and fall. *"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, with, and under His own Body and Blood.

So, come now and receive the Bread which only God can give, for here on our altar is the Bread which comes down from heaven, the Word of God made flesh given for you; and here is the Blood JESUS shed for you and the forgiveness of all sin. Eat this Bread. Drink this Drink. For he who eats the Flesh and drinks the Blood of the SON of Man in faith will see heaven. For the Body and Blood of our LORD is the *"Bread of God... who comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world."* *"If anyone eats of this Bread, he will live forever."*

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, be fed with the Word of God that declares your sins are forgiven.

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

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