

Invocavit - The First Sunday in Lent

Hymns: 34, 148, 306, 50

(omit Gloria, responses before & after the Gospel reading, and other ascriptions of praise during Lent.)

The INTROIT

(Ps. 91:15,16,1)

P: He shall call upon Me, and I will answer Him;

C: I will deliver him and honor him.

P: With long life will I satisfy him;

C: and show him My salvation.

P: He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High;

C: shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

(The "Gloria in Excelsis" is omitted during the Penitential Season of Lent)

The COLLECT

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Genesis 3:1-24

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

The GRADUAL

(Ps. 91:1-2,4,11-12)

P: For He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways.

C: They shall bear thee up in their hands lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

P: He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

C: I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress; my God, in Him will I trust. He shall cover thee with His feathers and under His wings shalt thou trust.

The EPISTLE

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.) Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

The SENTENCE for the Season

(Philippians 2:8)

P: Christ has humbled himself, and become obedient unto death:

C: even the death of the cross.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Genesis 3:1-24 — “To Keep the Way of the Tree of Life”

INTRODUCTION

- I. BEHOLD, THE MAN IS BECOME AS ONE OF US
- II. LEST HE PUT FORTH HIS HAND
- III. TO KEEP THE WAY OF THE TREE OF LIFE

CONCLUSION

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Hymns: 34, 148, 306, 50

Genesis 3:1-24 — “To Keep the Way of the Tree of Life”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is Invocavit, the First Sunday in Lent, and the appointed reading of the Old Testament is Genesis 3:1-24:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his

wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

No matter how many times that I read this passage of Holy Scripture, it seems that it always has more to say than I have heard before. Especially amazing is the richness of the declaration of the good and gracious will of the LORD God toward mankind. From the beginning of the Scriptures to the end, the never-ending declaration is one of the will of the LORD God **“to keep the way of the tree of life.”**

I. BEHOLD, THE MAN IS BECOME AS ONE OF US

From the beginning of this chapter to the end of it, the LORD God presents a contrast between the good and gracious will that is proclaimed in the first two chapters of the Book of Creation and the perverted and self-destructive will of the devil and of fallen man. Through His prophet, Moses, the LORD God actually mocks mankind's self determination and imagination. The LORD openly mocks with extreme sarcasm the imaginary notion of the free will of man. In the last paragraph of our text for this day the LORD declares, **“Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.”**

In his commentary on this book Luther rightly concludes that in this chapter the LORD is sarcastically mocking the false wisdom and choices of man. The very idea that man can do anything or choose anything to be like God is ludicrous. What could man do for himself other than what God has already done for us? What could man choose for himself that God has not already chosen for us?

Our text opens with the declaration: **“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.”** *“Subtle, shrewd, crafty, sly, sensible,”* these are the meanings of this word that Moses uses to describe the serpent. Notice how this is displayed in the serpent's actions. He comes to the woman with a question regarding the Word of God. Such questions should have been asked of Adam, but the serpent approaches the woman, thereby enticing her to forget or even to choose to ignore the order of Creation, to choose a way of life other than what the LORD God established and declared as good. By this the serpent sought to overturn the will of the LORD. Moreover, if the woman listened, she would already have turned from the way of the LORD by listening to the words of the serpent rather than her husband whom the LORD had placed over her. The temptation to seek wisdom from nature rather than from the declared Word of God was presented already at this point. This is what St. Paul points to in Romans 1:21-25. This is the temptation that leads to Darwinism and Evolution.

Notice also that the serpent refers to the Creator only as God and not as the LORD God. In the first accounting of creation Moses also refers to the Creator as God, the almighty creating

one. But in the second accounting Moses reveals God as the LORD God, who deals personally with man. The serpent is very subtle in this temptation to think of God as distant and impersonal. With this then the temptation to interpret God's declared Word and will is presented with the question, "**Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?**"

The subtlety of this question is doubled. First is the direct challenge regarding the doctrine, challenging whether or not the woman's understanding of God's Word is correct. Then, by an extremely subtle change to what the LORD actually said, the serpent causes the woman to question the goodness of God's will. "**Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?**" Out of all of the trees that the LORD God had planted, only one tree was declared to be not for man to count as a source of eating. By this subtlety the serpent introduced doubt concerning the fullness of God's Word and of the right preaching of God's Word by Adam. Did Adam really hear rightly? Did Adam preach it in its true meaning? Did the woman understand her pastor and husband rightly? Is there room for expanding this understanding?

Then comes the ultimate challenge. Who determines what is truly right and good? Who determines whether the doctrine is in conformity with the truth?

When the woman chose to answer the serpent she was already deceived, which she demonstrated by her answer. Instead of repeating what Adam had taught her, she improved upon it by adding a new commandment, "**neither shall ye touch it.**"

But who is really at fault ultimately? Adam stood by and allowed the serpent to question his wife. He further chose not to speak up with the pure Word and allowed his wife to answer for herself. He left her without the ordained guidance of the office of the Word that the LORD had entrusted to Adam. How often this has happened in families and in the Church ever since!

The serpent subtly expands the temptation. Now, with both the preacher and the congregation demonstrating their chosen willingness to expand the meaning of the Word through interpretation, now the serpent gives a new interpretation. God has held back wisdom from you. You need to reach out and grasp it for yourselves. Then you will be as gods.

The LORD spoke. He declared everything that He had created to be good. He pronounced this to those whom He created in His own image. He gave them the entire universe and set them over it as His gods over His creation. They had no need for making choices. Every good thing was clearly spelled out for them. Every good thing was provided for them freely. No work was necessary as God had finished all the work. The cosmos was theirs to enjoy. Adam already knew all things about the created order, even having himself named each of the animals. All things were in harmony.

But the serpent tempted man to put forth his hand so as to become as gods. As they put forth their hands and grasped what the LORD had established as set apart unto Himself, they lost what they had been given. When they chose their own form of worship and their own knowledge of the truth and of goodness, they lost all knowledge of the truth and of goodness. They sought the knowledge of good and evil and were no longer able to see the image of God in which He had created them. Such is the folly of the wisdom of free will. Such is the folly of choice. It is this that the LORD sarcastically mocks saying, "**Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know**

good and evil.”

II. LEST HE PUT FORTH HIS HAND

The LORD God loves mankind. From the beginning the LORD knew that man would choose the false way of death. From the beginning the LORD knew that His beloved children would ignore His loving commandment and choose their own way, the way of knowing evil. The LORD knew that His beloved children would discard the way of life that He had lovingly established for them and would cut themselves off from the life of goodness and grace. He knew that they would put forth their hand and let go of what He had given them. He knew that they would put forth their hand and destroy themselves. And so He bound to the woman the Seed of redemption and salvation, even from the beginning, even before the invention of so-called *free will*.

After man put forth his hand and sought to take for himself what Lord intended to keep from man for the good of all, the LORD came with the Word of redemption. Man chose the way of death and darkness, imagining that he was choosing something good. Man chose the way in which it seemed that he would gain something more, but actually lost the life for which he had been created. The good and holy image of God was now perverted and corrupted so that man could no longer stand the sight of his own body. He sought to cover himself and hide the evil that he had chosen. He now was corrupt and dead inside. His very body was dead. No longer was everlasting life a good thing, for now that life was full of the rottenness of death. Man had put forth his hand to take for himself what could only be received as a gift. He turned God's grace into the way of work and toil and misery. He turned the life that is by faith into a continual striving for that which man cannot attain by his own efforts.

How ironic. What God would freely give, man ignores. What God would protect man from, man puts forth his hand to take. Even more ironic is that what God does give freely, man insists that he must take for himself or create for himself.

Man chose to embrace evil along side of what is good. Good and evil cannot be known together. This is why even the LORD Jesus on the cross cried out, **“My God! My God! Why have You forsaken me?”** For our sake, He who knew no sin was made to be sin. He took our sin completely so that even the perfect and holy Son of God could no longer know goodness but could only see the evil that separates us from the loving countenance of God. Even though the Lord Jesus never lost His goodness, our sin blotted out His communion with God. Even though the Father was fully present in the person of the Son, darkness and abandonment was all that Jesus could see on account of our sin, which He fully and completely took for us.

Ah, here we see the goodness of God restored. The Son of God and Son of Man put forth His hand and took what we had put forth our hand to take. The sin, the knowledge of evil, that we reached out to take, Jesus took from us and for us.

Now the grace of God is restored in Christ in His body. What was given freely from the beginning purely by grace is again ours through the faith given in Baptism. The faith that God gave by creating man in His image is given again by regenerating us through the faith poured out in Baptism. As the promise of God is spoken with the water, the Holy Spirit is poured out to us and enters us and regenerates the faith of Jesus. And so the image of God is restored and we

begin to live again by the faith that Jesus authored and completes for us.

III. TO KEEP THE WAY OF THE TREE OF LIFE

Yet we still imagine that we must put forth our hand and take hold for ourselves. Thus Moses records:

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Why do we imagine that God's grace through faith is something that we must take hold of and grasp by our own efforts? Faith is God's gift. Faith is what the Holy Spirit works in us. Salvation is God's work, completed in Christ Jesus. The choice is God's choice. He chose to bind human flesh to His Godhead so as to suffer and die as a sinner in our place. He chose to raise Himself from the dead, keeping the living body of Jesus as everlasting guarantee of the life that He won back for us. He chose to ascend to heaven in the flesh to rule on our behalf. He chose to establish Baptism as the means of entrance back into the kingdom of God. He chose to establish the New Testament in His blood whereby He renews us in the faith given in Baptism and forgives us anew and rejoins us in communion with Him. This is all His doing. He puts forth His hand and draws us unto Himself.

By our own choice, we choose to ignore His grace and we seek to believe for ourselves. We hear the Gospel and imagine that we must choose to believe it. We imagine that we must somehow make believers of ourselves so that we can draw near to receive God's grace.

This is why the LORD God drove Adam from the garden of Eden. He sent Adam out from the Garden where he would see just how futile free will really is. Every day his body would ache with the toils of trying to provide for himself. Every day the ground from which he had been taken would call to his aging body to return again into the soil. Every day the thorns and thistles would grow up and compete with the crops that he would plant, even to the point of interfering with the harvest. Every day the man would see that his very best efforts all turn to dust. The woman, also, would face the pains of childbearing and the bleeding of womanhood. In her very body she would be reminded of the choice of death that her inattentiveness to her husband led her to choose. Her husband had taught her God's pure Word, but she listened instead to the worries of the world. **"What shall we eat?"** she wondered? **"How can we do better for ourselves?"** she heard from the subtle serpent? And Adam, desiring to please his wife, listened to her nagging.

So the LORD drove them out from the garden where they had ignored His gracious providence and chose to do for themselves. He drove them out from the garden so that they would see what all their worrying and choosing for themselves would accomplish. He drove them out so that when they would put forth their hand they would draw it back with thorns and scratches and cuts and bruises and soreness from the futility of their efforts.

Moreover, the LORD placed cherubim and a flaming sword to keep the way of the tree of life. The LORD did this, He says, lest man try again to put forth his hand to try to take for himself what can only be received by grace through faith as God's work and not of ourselves. Death had entered the world through the sin of one man. Thus God could not permit man to reach out and take hold of the fruit of the tree of life and live forever. Man had to die and return to the soil. God had to become man and die as a sinner in the stead of Man. Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross and be buried. Mankind had to die to sin. Therefore, the LORD could not permit man to remain in the garden and try to grasp from the tree of life. The death that Adam chose had to be defeated by the death of God in the flesh.

And so today, the cherubim still stand at the east with the flaming sword. God still appoints angels to excommunicate those who would put forth their hands and eat of the tree of life by their own efforts. Yes, the true pastors in the Church preach the fiery word of the sword that burns up all of our choices and works. The preaching of the Law shows us that by our own efforts we bring forth nothing but death and decay. The Law teaches us that faith is not of ourselves but a gift of God. The Law teaches us that we cannot come to the Lord's table to receive the food of heaven except through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. No choice, no sacrifice, no knowledge, no understanding of our own can make us worthy to partake of the meal of life.

Thus Christ ordained and commanded that disciples be made by means of baptizing the nations, followed by lifelong catechesis in the pure doctrine of the Gospel. No one can baptize himself. Baptism must be done for us by one who has already been regenerated into the kingdom of God's grace. Moreover, the Holy Supper, is administered to us and cannot be taken for ourselves. God's Word is the power connected to the water, and to the bread and wine. By these means God keeps the way of the tree of life. He keeps it sacred and set apart unto Himself. He keeps it from our grasp so that we must receive it from Him by grace.

CONCLUSION

Can we even begin to count the goodness, mercy, love, and patience of the LORD our God? In everything He works good to those who love Him, the called according to His purpose. Is this not amazing? He works His love in us and then He counts it to us as our love. He calls us out of the darkness of our sin and surrounds us with the light of His love. He preaches to us through called and ordained servants and baptizes us with His Word by which He regenerates faith in our hearts and souls. He takes up residence in us and calls us His holy people. He places His name upon us in Baptism and calls us to gather into His name together as His body. As those gathered as His body He feeds us and strengthens us with His body and blood. Through all these things He provides for us what we cannot hope to obtain for ourselves. We face strife and toil in our daily lives, but He calls us apart from these things unto Himself to receive from Him His grace, mercy, and peace. This is the way of the tree of life that He keeps for us. He has chosen life for us. There is no choice, no decision, no work left for us to make. The table is prepared before us in Christ Jesus. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.