

Invocavit

21 February, Anno Domini 2021

St. Matthew 4:1-11

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

The peace of Christ to all of you who have suffered these past two weeks under these treacherous weather conditions. If you have suffered damage or need help in any way, please don't hesitate to reach out to the church and let your brothers and sisters in Christ know what you need.

To say that the Christian life isn't glamorous would be an understatement. It is not proven by success or power. The Lord said to St. Paul "My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness." Your moral fortitude is not the barometer of your faith (though good works most certainly will flow from true faith). Jesus said "Apart from Me, you can do no good thing." Your Baptism didn't give you special powers or remove all your weaknesses. Nor does it exempt you from pain or tribulation. Jesus said "Whoever would be my disciple must take up his cross daily and follow me." Anyone who tries to tell you otherwise is selling you the devil's goods and leading you away from Christ. Flee from such charlatans. They serve themselves, not Christ. They seek nothing but your adoration and money. They are master manipulators who prey on the desires of your flesh and dress up their lies in the precious name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

But our flesh is easily deceived. Our flesh thinks it needs to accomplish notable, grand things. Isn't that what it means to give your life to Christ - to be drawn into the circle of winners and become the master of your own fate? We think that the life well-spent is the one that is spent chasing achievements and growth and the praise of our friends and colleagues. Such a life is certainly easier. It requires nothing of you - no sacrifice, no honesty, no love. Now, that seems counter intuitive. But those for whom the treasures of this world are their goal, can't be bothered by the greatest sacrifice, the hardest work, the truest love - dying to yourself and your own desires. They would readily change the stones into bread to satisfy their hunger, jump from the temple mount to test God's promises, and bow the knee to Satan for the success and power they crave.

And you have. You have not been satisfied with what God has given - be it daily bread or crosses. You have considered yourself the owner of all in your possession rather than the steward who is to faithfully manage what belongs to another. You have put the Lord your God to the test by diving headlong into lust and greed, self-

protection, thievery, idolatry, laziness, bitterness, anxiousness, presumptuously assuming that you cannot fall from grace, that God's wrath against sin isn't real. You have bent the knee before Satan (whatever mask he is wearing and name he is going by) for offers far less than authority over kingdoms - sacrificing the things of God for comfort, for fun, for self, for wealth, for the possibility of one more day of life. For mere moments of pleasure, you have made the ancient serpent your master, you have chosen eternal death and damnation, and traded the truth of the Word of God for the demons' lies.

This is the theology of glory which claims that you are free and, indeed, drives you with whips and cords, to slavishly chase after self-improvement, self-aggrandizement, and self-glorification. Surely God's will for you is that you be happy, healthy, wealthy, and wise. Let no one get in your way, not even God Himself. Eschew the weak and broken because they will bring you down. Deny yourself nothing because your happiness is all that matters. Let absolutely no one rob you of your truth no matter how contrary to the Word of God that so-called truth may be. It is true and good and God-pleasing if it's what you want. Your body, your life, your goods - they all belong to you to do with however you so choose. And don't worry, because God will always whisper sweetly in your ear that every intention of your heart is good.

Be warned. If you follow these pied pipers they will lead you straight over the cliff of eternal death while you sing a happy tune and strut about thinking quite highly of yourself. They count on those who care nothing for the actual Word of God and trade it instead for the shiny, pleasurable treasures of this world and those who will tell them exactly what their itching ears desperately long to hear.

Your Baptism calls you daily to repent of such foolishness, to die to yourself and your ambition and to cast aside pride and ego and self-fulfillment. Your Baptism bestowed upon you eternal treasures of such grandeur that anything else you could buy or accomplish is nothing more than trash in comparison. In your Baptism, rather than casting you out into the wilderness where all men deserve to be, the Holy Spirit drew you up out of the wilderness and into the kingdom of God's righteousness. It bestowed upon you the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ Jesus who went to the wilderness to face down Satan on your behalf and overcome him, once and for all.

We could never do this. Our daily life is certainly living proof of that. Day in and day out we listen to the siren voice of our fleshly desires and, though we know better, we listen to the lies as though this time our conscience won't crash upon the rocks and sink again into the depths of despair as it has every other time. We think that our anger and rage will bring about the obedience of our children. We frequently despise

the Sabbath Day and the holy gathering of God's people into God's presence to receive the life and salvation that He alone bestows through the hearing of the Gospel and the holy food of Christ's life-giving Body and Blood. We say wretched and unloving things about those we love and those we hate. We make every excuse under the sun to not pray, to not study God's Word. We stand silently by as lies swirl around us and cause vast amounts of carnage everywhere we turn because we fear the opinions of men. We let our neighbor suffer in need because we don't want to get involved or the cost seems a bit too steep.

We have met Satan. And in the midst of our comfort, we have succumbed. We have reached out our hands and taken what was forbidden as though God was a liar and didn't really know what was good for us. We ought to be forced to eat the bitter and eternal consequences of our arrogance and stupidity. God would be perfectly justified if He drove us out of His presence forever to spend eternity with the devil we chose to serve.

But that is exactly what He hasn't done. Instead, it was the Father's will to drive His Son out - out into the wilderness, outside the walls of Jerusalem, and directly into the jaws of Satan. God beheld our hopelessly wretched state and saw that of our own will, we would never choose to leave death, because we are too enamored with ourselves and this world. He saw how we drunkly stagger about, harming ourselves, harming one another, and falling into pit after pit of despair. Thus the perfectly obedient Son of God willingly submitted Himself to mortal flesh to do all that is required of you for you. He was not simply an example. That wouldn't have saved you. If anything, it would have further condemned you. But that is not what He came into the world to do. The Lord Jesus was a substitute. He believed as you should believe, but don't. He prayed as you should pray, but don't. He held the Word and will of His heavenly Father as His highest joy and treasure as you should, but don't. He spoke the divine truth at the cost of family, reputation, and life as you should, but don't. He died under the wrath of God as you should, but now, having been baptized into the death of Christ, you won't.

Instead, in Him, by the working of the Holy Spirit, you will live. Your sins have been blotted out, paid for by the Blood of Jesus. His flesh bore the stripes and punishment that rightly belong to you. Your redemption came not at the cost of silver or gold but at the incomprehensible cost of the life of God's only Son, a price that He was more than happy to pay for you. That is the truest and plainest and most beautiful Gospel - His Body and His Blood, given and shed for you. His death. That is your life.

Thus, dear child of God, your life in God isn't something you will recognize or know by sight. You can't measure it in dollars or awards or health or job promotions. It is

hidden with Christ in God. It is a life that those who love this world and their life in it can't understand and many even hate. It is a life that is given as a gift through the declaration of God that you are forgiven. It is a life that is not earned or deserved. It is a life that you can't buy nor can you even keep by your own efforts. It is a life that is given by the Word of God and sustained by the Word of God. Though you have not a scrap of bread in your cabinets or a penny to your name, though your body is consumed by sickness, though your sins be as scarlet, the child of God is more alive and infinitely wealthier than the healthiest, richest, most popular man on planet earth.

You will suffer temptation and heartache and loss. As those who love God and His Word you will be hated and rejected by many. But, dear child of God, do not lose heart. These are but passing sorrows that will give way to an eternity of joys just as surely your Lord and brother, Jesus Christ, has risen from the dead. And on the last day you will be drawn together with all the saints out of this wilderness and into the glorious kingdom of your heavenly Father. Take up the life and righteousness of Christ when Satan comes to tempt you. Satan is already a defeated enemy who has nothing to offer you but empty lies and death. Christ alone is your life. He is your obedience. His is your righteousness. And in Him, you are more than conquerors.

In the Name of +Jesus.