

Matthew 4.1-11  
*Invocabit*, the First Sunday in Lent  
18 February 2018  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +\*

Beloved in the Lord: Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

The whole WWJD movement has certainly gotten us all mixed up. Even Lutherans, who should know better. When a Lutheran—which is to say, a Christian—looks at Jesus she should be asking herself, “What *has* Jesus done?” not “What *would* Jesus do?”

After all, what Jesus would do is this. As the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Most Holy Trinity, He would, in the boundless love He shares with the Father create a world and a crown of His creation to be the object of His love.

And when the crown of His creation fell into sin and brought nothing but misery and death upon itself and eternal death, He would continue to love that world. Inexplicably but for His mercy and grace.

And in His love for the crown of His creation—inexplicable but for His grace and mercy—He would desire to take on human flesh. He would come forth from the Father in the fullness of time and return to Him. Meanwhile, between incarnation and ascension, He would constantly teach His fallen creatures of His salvation. By making the blind to see. By healing lepers and paralytics. By raising the dead. By preaching the Gospel to those without hope, Himself the sum and substance of that Gospel. And He would live, fully God, as a human, so that by succumbing to the death that belongs to His humans He could from His holy cross bring life.

And then, for them and to open the way to everlasting life, He would rise again on the third day and ascend into heaven. And He would elevate the human nature from the depths of its hellish sin and sinful hell to the joys of heaven for all who believe in Him. That's what Jesus *would* do.

You try that.

No. The heart of faith doesn't ask what Jesus would do—as if by His example to come to some new and higher morality. To become Christlike ... for whatever reason.

Instead, the heart of faith asks for and receives what Jesus *has* done. And it gets in scads. Faith gets it by water connected with His Word. It gets it by His Body and Blood eaten and drunk at His command. It gets it on the breath of man compelled into servitude to the life-giving Word of God by a divine Call. It asks what Jesus *has* done and before it has said the word “done,” it has its answer: He has borne all sins. He has suffered and died for them. He has left the treasures of heaven here on earth in Word and Sacrament. And rules all things for the good of His holy Church.

Not: what *would* Jesus do. WWJD. But: what *has* Jesus done. WHJD.

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And so you've got basically two approaches to the Gospel for today. Take the WWJD approach, and it becomes a textbook for what to do in a knife fight with the devil.

Take the WHJD approach—the what *has* Jesus done approach, the approach of faith—and the Lord's temptation in the wilderness comes into focus for what it actually is. Not how to jab and slice at the devil and temptation. But a beautiful teaching of Scripture and comfort to you, a sinner. It teaches you that you actually have a Savior. That you actually have a Substitute. That you actually have One who has done for you what you cannot. Thanks and praise be to God!

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Now I want to tap the brakes here a little bit—not in the left lane, Pr. Kerns; I'll move right—but tap the brakes and pause to look at something that's not immediately noticeable in the Gospel for today.

Grammar quiz: what's the difference between the imperative and the indicative mood?

Stumped you, eh?

Well, let me re-phrase the question; what's the difference between a command and a statement of fact?

Now you get what I'm getting onto here. Just take a simple verb like "drink." If I say, "Hey, you, drink!" that's very different from saying "you are drinking." If I command it, it might not happen. If I speak it as fact, it is happening. If I command it, I'm giving a *prescription*. If I give it as fact, I'm giving a *description*. You get what I'm saying, right?

Okay, so let's apply this to God's Word: When the Lord says, "You shall have no other gods before Me," we've heard it so long as the "1<sup>st</sup> Commandment" that we think of it as an imperative. A command. But it's not. It's indicative and a statement of fact. And that's how it goes through all the Ten Commandments. "Thou shalt not" does not mean, "I'm commanding you: don't do this!" It's a statement of fact describing how God's redeemed Israel is.

Redeemed Israel, when they're truly and rightly redeemed Israel, do not take the name of the Lord in vain. That's a description. An assumed fact.

Redeemed Israel, when they're truly and rightly redeemed Israel, don't commit adultery or steal or covet. And they remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Description. Assumed fact.

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Well, now, look at what depth of rupture there is now between God and His creatures—even His chosen Israel. His Word describes them as fearing, loving, and trusting in Him above all things. And they don't. His Word describes them as not taking His name in vain. But they do. His Word describes them as keeping the Sabbath. But they don't. His Word describes them as honoring mother and father. But they don't. And it describes them as not murdering, hating, or harming; not committing adultery and other sexual sins; not stealing or pilfering; not telling lies and throwing their neighbor under the bus; not coveting what God never gave them. And they *do*. *You do*.

But here in the temptation of Christ, Another steps in on Israel's behalf. And Jesus does it for them.

Now, remember when Jesus' temptation happened: it was right after His Baptism. Right after the Father for the first time in Jesus' earthly life spoke from the cloud: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Those of you are participating in our *Year with the Bible* have just *seen* this. Jacob, who was born last—God turns him into the firstborn and favored son. And the Lord gives Him the name "Israel." Israel went to Egypt. The nation—Israel's descendants—became enslaved. But God remembered His promises. And He told Moses, "You shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says YHWH, "Israel is My firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.''" (Ex 4.22-23)

"Let My firstborn go that he may serve Me." And after 9 plagues of warning, the LORD finally dealt the death-blow. He brought death upon the firstborn in every household of Egypt. Pharaoh finally relented. Israel passed through the Red Sea. The army of Pharaoh was defeated and drowned by the Lord. And then Israel went into the wilderness to serve the Lord.

But no sooner had they gotten there than they began to complain—the water didn't taste good; the food was bad. And quite soon they were doing exactly the opposite of the way God describes His redeemed people: they bowed down to the image of a god they had invented.

But, as Pr. Kerns pointed out on Wednesday night, when they did that it wasn't God who broke. It was Israel. And yet, just as surely as a wall to be a wall must stand, because that's the description of a wall; and just as surely as a window to be a window must have some level of transparency, because that's the description of a window—so surely must the redeemed people of God live according to all the indicative moods of the 10 Commandments. God's people have no other gods. They don't use His name in vain. They keep the Sabbath.

And so Israel was a complete failure. A colossal failure. Not God's failure, mind you. But their own. Lumped in with the rest of godless humanity, they could never live up to the indicative moods—the holy description—of the 10 Commandments. Just like you can't. And don't.

But remember what kind of God God is. In His love for His fallen creatures, He won't have it this way. And so He sends a New Israel, the Lord Christ. Old Israel came through the Red Sea and prefigured New Israel. The Lord Christ is baptized. And in His Baptism He is made the New Israel. Old Israel was sent immediately into the wilderness. And, immediately, for the Lord Christ it's into the wilderness. And 40 days without food. But no grumbling. Compare that with 40 years of Old Israel's grumbling at the bread from heaven, their manna.

But here's the kicker. And here's what really shows Jesus to be the New Israel. Here's what really cinches it. Every passage of Scripture that the Lord Jesus cites back to the devil in the temptation in the wilderness *is in the indicative mood*. "Man will not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Factual description. Indicative mood. And that's exactly how Jesus, the New Israel lives. "You will not tempt the Lord your God." Description of a fact. Indicative mood. And that's exactly what Jesus, the New Israel, doesn't do. "You will worship the Lord your God, and Him alone will you serve." Description of a fact. Indicative mood. And so the New Israel does.

He does everything Old Israel could not and did not do. He doesn't do anything that Old Israel couldn't helping doing and did.

And so here in the temptation in the wilderness is One who stands in Israel's place. Here is One who is their Substitute. As if God Himself had replaced a broken tea pot with a brand new unbreakable one.

What a comfort to Israel! Like Esau by their own sin they had thrown away their birthright. But Christ restored it. And it was only by faith in this promised New Israel that they could be the Israel that God had created when He called His firstborn son out of Egypt: holy, blameless, sinless, and righteous.

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Well, good for Old Israel, right? But what about me? I'm not a descendant of Israel! I don't have a drop of Jewish blood running through my veins. What about me? What good is all this?

Remember how this all started: it started with the Lord's Baptism. Old Israel's Baptism was their passing through the Red Sea. That's what Paul says. And passing through the Red Sea, they not only pointed toward Christ's Baptism, they themselves were baptized into Christ. What was His—His victory over temptation and the devil; His victory over death and hell—that was made theirs. Then and there. Good news for Old Israel.

And good news for you. Your Baptism is no different from Christ's. That's why you're joined to Him in it. It's simply water connected with the Word. And what happened with Old Israel—the exchange of their sin for Christ's righteousness—that's exactly what happens with you. What's Christ's is made yours; and what's yours is made Christ's. Where you succumb to temptation, Christ hasn't. And that's charged to you. Where you can't withstand the assaults of the devil, Christ did. And that's charged to you. And where Christ received the blessing of the Father's voice from the cloud, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." ... Well, the Father never said that of you ... until, that is, you were baptized, and made one with Christ.

So let's go back to where we started originally—with the difference between what would Jesus do and what did Jesus do. Now, certainly, the Word of God is called the sword of the Spirit, and it's the Christian's tool against all the wiles of the devil and against all his works and ways and against every temptation. When faced with those things, use it. It will serve you well.

But that's not what this Gospel is about. This Gospel is not about finding the right word against thus and such a temptation, the right divine parry against thus and such a thrust of the devil. No. The word that it gives you is this: your strength and comfort in the face of every temptation and even the devil himself; your strength and comfort in the face of death and even hell itself ... is this: You have a Substitute, the Lord Christ, who has overcome every temptation on your behalf. Who has cast Satan and his unholy angels into hell and done a victory lap around them. Who is King of the nations not by an unholy grant of the devil, but by the blood of His cross. Whose foot was kept from stumbling not by some foolish temptation of His Father, but whose foot was pierced for your transgression. And who has given you not bread to live by, and for this life only, but His Word, for this life and the next: "I am your Substitute. I am your holiness. I am your life."

That's what Jesus has most certainly done.

Amen.

*pax dei, etc.*

*sdg*  
*jsb*

*\*Iesu iuva means Jesus, help! Used as a sermon heading during Advent, Lent, and at funerals.*