

Life Sunday Sermon 2020

Genesis 3:1-24 “Did God Really Say?”

Rev. Michael W. Salemink, Executive Director, Lutherans For Life

www.lutheransforlife.org

Satan masquerades as a heavenly messenger. St. Paul the Apostle proclaims the devil disguises himself as an angel of light. He doesn't sport horns or hooves, pitchfork or pointed tail, venomous fangs or leathery wings. Lucifer looks and sounds exactly like everything you've ever wanted. He dresses up in what we'd expect God to wear. The deceiver even parrots the Almighty and simulates the voice of Scripture. As soon as the Heavenly Father spreads the table of His everlasting feast with filet mignon and fine wine, the old evil foe shoves a tray of cakes made of mud and cow pies in our face, serving up a wide variety of sugar-coated, pleasantly scented poisons.

“Wait a minute,” he purrs. “Wouldn't you rather have your pick? Control tastes better than contentment, doesn't it? Selection beats survival!” And so, “Wherever God erects a house of prayer, the devil always builds a chapel there, and 'twill be found, upon examination, the latter has the largest congregation!” Ah, but Satan doesn't stop with just one chapel. He mass-produces them, peppering us from the left and from the right, row upon row of options like models at the automobile lot. Behold, every size and shape and shade and speed you please—but only going one direction. Oh, so many doors, with handles custom-fit to your own grip. Open any one, and end up at the same place.

“Here,” he smooth-talks. “Take the keys; go ahead, the whole ring full! Sink yourself into the driver's seat. Fit your fingers around the wheel. Fix the mirrors on your reflection. Press the pedals and buttons, set the switches and levers. Yours the preference, yours the power!” Little does he let on that they all lead to but a single destination. “How about the life-issues edition? It comes in varieties such as abortion or physician-assisted suicide. Take in vitro fertilization or

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fetal-tissue experiments for a spin! Rights and privacies standard! Features include autonomy and equality!

“The paperwork? You want the fine print? Well, let’s have a look. Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat’? What, does He want you to go hungry? Why would He forbid what He has formed you to desire? He hasn’t prohibited any of the other animals, and they appear the happier for it. He must mean for you also to enjoy His creation. He Himself made it so tasty and attractive. You do have a mouth, after all. Your eyeballs and nostrils wouldn’t lie to you. Listen to your body. It’s natural and normal. A good God wouldn’t design pleasure only to deny it to you.

“He’s defined it as a spiritual experience. He means for it to bring you closer to God. Refrain, if that works for you. But maybe someone else partakes, and that enriches their religious expression. The heart wants what the heart wants! Sure, a few may choose to view these fruits as precious because the Maker has paid them special attention. That doesn’t mean they can impose their perspective on everyone else. Show some initiative. Take responsibility and make progress. Mature, improve, evolve! He wouldn’t have you bury your talents in the ground.

“This tree stands in the way of your advancement. It puts obstacles, impediments, interruptions, inconveniences in front of you! It’s posing a threat to your well-being! We’re talking about health care here and self-defense! A bite doesn’t obligate you to finish the fruit or even chew. No one should force you to digest what you swallow. Picking one piece ought not commit you to caring for the whole plant. Consuming an acorn won’t amount to killing an oak. Looks more like a mass of tissue or a cluster of cells than a living thing, really. Would you rather they just wither away, suffering an undignified shriveling, a protracted and purposeless wilting?

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"And did God really say, 'In pain you shall bring forth children'? Did God really say, 'In pain you shall eat of the ground'? Some sanctity of life, huh. He doesn't even value every one Himself. So many perish, and often before birth. Others will only know agony, abuse, impairments, poverty. Can't God see bad stuff is going on? Doesn't He want it not to? Couldn't He do something about it? Well, what kind of God is He, anyway? Why bring new lives into a world of hurt? Every additional one stretches already-limited resources thinner.

"You see what happens when you get wrapped up in religion? You see what good it does to waste your time worrying about invisible eternities? You don't need that sadistic nonsense. The whole system only increases suffering. Of course some folks will focus on not-yet lives or not-anymore lives instead of dealing with the real needs of the ones right in front of them. But sometimes you have to abandon the ideal, don't you, and go with the lesser evil, the one that makes the most immediate difference.

"And did God really say, 'You will surely die'? Did God really say, 'To dust you shall return'? What's so bad about that? Death offers deliverance, resolution, escape. Death gives you ultimate authority, independence, omnipotence. Embrace death and devise your own salvation, on your terms, in your time. Better to burn out than fade away! Especially since you deserve it. Your body, your choice, your problem, your fault. Take your licks like a big boy. Grow up, little girl, and lie in this bed that you made. Quit calling it praying when you've just gotten lazy. Stop making excuses and make the most of the only moments you have. If a hero were on his way, he'd have swooped in and saved the day by now. You must not matter as much as you thought. And if you don't, then no one else does either. Nothing has any real meaning, merely random

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chance, chaos and accidents, fluctuations of matter, freaks of nature. Anyway, heroes don't rescue villains; they kill them.”

You know what, though? You don't have to sign on that dotted line. However slick the devil's pitch, however hard the sell, anywhere that Satan plants his chapels, the Heavenly Father makes human flesh His temple. This God makes human bodies His abode and raises Himself a home in hearts. Yes, the evil one may don a heavenly costume and put on a hell of a con, but our Savior—the real One—He wraps Himself in bare humanity and wears the sins and pains that press against our own skin. He lovingly lays aside His magnificence in order to clothe our kind with it. And He commandeers our surprise pregnancies, infertilities, and terminal diagnoses. He engineers those uncomfortable circumstance of life-issue situations into a vehicle by hiding grace inside them. Then while He treads the sod through the very valley of death's shadow itself, He collects feeble human beings into His own everlasting arms and chauffeurs us into the kingdom of heaven.

This God really says, “Made male and female in His own image.” This God really says, “Formed first from the warm earth,” meticulously crafted not only by His mighty Word but with His own hands. This God really says, “One fashioned from the other's ribcage,” intimately assembled cell by cell with His very fingers. This God really says, “Breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” face to face, a privilege not given to deepest seas or highest peaks; not to beasts of the field, birds of the air, fish that teem the waters, or critters creeping the ground; not to stars in heavens or angels themselves but only bestowed upon our race, every genetic member of the species *Homo sapiens*. It proclaims every human life special, no matter what age.

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And this God really says, “I will put enmity between your offspring and hers.” He enters into the tangle between sinners and the ancient snake. The strong Word became embryo—born of woman, born under law—and settled among us. Though all the fullness of the Godhead inhabits Him in bodily form, He did not grasp at equality with the Father but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant and the likeness of men. He partakes of blood and bone, made like the least of these brothers and sisters of His in every respect, bearing our sickness and carrying our sorrows. He humbles Himself, obedient even to death on a cross, that through death He may destroy death’s hold and both deliver and redeem those of us subject to its enslavement. This God really says, “Made garments of skins and clothed them.” He supplies a substitute to undergo punishment in our place, makes up for everything that offspring of Eve and descendants of Adam make wrong. And by this sacrifice, Jesus Christ sanctifies suffering, imparts purpose to pain, perfects His power in human weakness, and justifies and reconciles every last person who shares our nature. It proves every human life precious, no matter what appearance.

And this God really says, “Where are you?” He calls earnestly to the very ones He ought to abandon. He declares no pleasure in the death of anyone but rather bids His whole creation groans together in the pangs of childbirth in eager anticipation for the appearing of His little ones. His resurrection has recovered every lost cause, flushed us each clean and forgiven, that all such mortal receptacles might from fertilization to final breath become vessels of divine fellowship. Deeply He desires nothing else than that all humankind know His salvation; receive His love; trust His name; experience His kingdom’s homecoming; and enjoy every blessing of hope and healing, peace and comfort, worth and purpose that He promises. The Church of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may have only one door, and a small simple one at that, but it seats

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innumerable multitudes, with plenty still open and more getting set up as we speak. It pronounces every human life priceless, no matter what ability.

And this God really says, “Go forth from Eden.” This God really says, “Leave behind the confines of the forest.” This God really says, “Work ye the ground.” He has made us messengers, designated us representatives, appointed us ambassadors and agents of this Gospel. We get front-row seats not only to witness but even to participate in the miraculous activity of Almighty God. Incarnate, crucified, risen, and gracious Jesus girds us with a courage that changes minds and a compassion that saves lives. Baptized into His existence and bedecked with His own body and blood, we each in our unique stations of society speak truth and show love and share life. Lutherans For Life goes about with you bringing sanctity and dignity to endangered ones, joy and hope to the desperate, comfort to those alone, peace to those afraid, and the relieving freedom of forgiveness to consciences ashamed at having advocated or enacted violence against life. Rejoice and be glad with us, for Satan can’t proliferate chapels fast enough or plant them far enough to silence this eternal assurance! Amen.