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Lent 1

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Vienna, VA

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“Comfortable with Sin?”

Text: Matthew 4:1-11; Romans 5:12-19; Genesis 3:1-21

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

It's okay. No problem. Don't worry about it. That is what we often say to those who sin against us. It has become a way of saying *I forgive you*. That I will not hold the sin against you. That it will not divide us any further.

But perhaps we are belittling sin with those words. Perhaps those words have become so common these days because we've gotten so used to the reality of sin and its division and hurt that we cannot see its seriousness anymore. We take the reality of sin - both in the world and in our lives - for granted.

And so we begin this Lenten season - and every Lenten season - by taking another look at sin; by reconsidering its seriousness; and to stop taking it for granted in our lives. To stop assuming that this is just the way things are and will always be. Oh well.

For God does not think thus about sin. He would set us free from sin. He doesn't want us to get comfortable with sin - with our own sin or the sins of others - but to be uncomfortable with them. To want things to be different. To want ourselves to be different. To want to stop the sinning and our resignation to it, and begin to live in a new way, with a new life.

Adam and Eve were the first to begin to live in a new way and with a new life - though it was not a better way and life. They went from life to death, from perfection to sin. The change was noticable and severe. And they would not get used to it. I'm sure they would always remember the way things used to be, before they were so stupid, and long every day to have it back that way. But there was no going back.

For God had said: *The day you eat of that one tree*, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, *you will surely die* (Genesis 2:17). One rule, God had given them. One Law. One little thing. And they couldn't even do that. And from the moment their teeth sank into that fruit, they began to live on death row. As we heard, there would be strife in the world. There would be strife between them. Childbearing would still be joyful but now also painful. Adam's pleasing work would now be toil. And one day they would return to the dust of the ground from which they came. Or, as we considered Wednesday night, Ash

Wednesday, the process of turning them back to dust had already begun.

And then, when their children started killing each other, they found out how destructive sin was. It wasn't okay. It was a problem. They should worry about it.

So have you grown comfortable with sin?

To think about that, let's consider the temptation of Jesus that we heard about today. We're told about three temptations in particular, though there may have been more. But let's hold these temptations up to our own lives and see how we do . . . Actually, today, I want to hold up *Jesus' responses* to the temptations, hold them up to our lives, and see how we do . . . Maybe they will help us see all this in a slightly different way.

So first, satan suggests that Jesus turn stones into bread. A reasonable suggestion, we might say, for someone who has been fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. And to us who have grown used to the reality of sin, not a very big deal.

But how does Jesus respond? *It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'* When is the last time you hungered for God's Word like you hunger for your breakfast, lunch, or dinner? When was the last time you even thought God's Word was *as important* as those meals? When was the last time you "ate" God's Word three times in a day? (Three times!? How often do we fail to eat even once?) And have you ever thought that without God's Word *you could not live*? That you would die? And that every word of God is important?

It's not okay, is it? It is a problem, isn't it? We should worry about it, shouldn't we?

The next temptation is for Jesus to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple. Don't live in weakness and lowliness. Show the world the power and love of God for you when His angels come swooping in to save you.

But how does Jesus respond? *Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'* When is the last time you did just that - put God to the test? Not wanting what He has given you and so testing Him to show His love for you by giving you something better? Not satisfied with weakness or lowliness but wanting power? Wanting something more glorious? Wanting God to act how we think He should or we want Him to, rather than believing and trusting that all things are *already* working for our good?

It's not okay, is it? It is a problem, isn't it? We should worry about it, shouldn't we?

And then there is the third temptation, which doesn't really, honestly, make a whole lot of sense to us - satan asking Jesus to fall down and worship him. For who would do that? But again, Jesus' answer helps us understand . . . that we do. *'You shall worship the Lord*

your God and him only shall you serve.'

But *do you* worship and serve other gods? Think of it this way: think of your heart as a Temple. Who's on the altar in there? Who or what do you make sacrifices for? Who or what do you give things up for? God, certainly! But He's not the only one, is He? And while we do serve God by serving others and sacrificing for others that He has given to us, serving them in our callings, in our vocations - and that's good and right - we do get it wrong too, don't we? Lowering God and raising other people, other things, other wants, other desires. Being less concerned with God and what He thinks of us than what others think of us. Wanting others (including ourselves) to be pleased more than for God to be pleased.

And that's not okay, is it? It is a problem, isn't it? We should worry about that, shouldn't we? Jesus' responses to these temptations show that perhaps He sees something in these that we do not see. That maybe we've gotten too comfortable with the way things are . . .

So this Lenten season calls to us to repent. To get uncomfortable with life here and now and the sin in us and in the world, and look to Jesus for something else. A life maybe not easier, but better. A life where sin doesn't rule so much. A new life that *reverses* the way that Adam and Eve went, and goes from death to life, from sin to righteousness.

On our own, we do not know such a life. On our own, we follow Adam and Eve down the path of sin and death. And get used to it. Make the best of it. Think nothing of it.

But then Jesus came along. And into this "*it's okay, no problem, don't worry about it*" world, we see something else, someone different, better, not the same old, same old, but someone who lives and breathes freedom and forgiveness. And so He sticks out like a sore thumb. He doesn't fall for the temptations of satan, like Adam, like Eve, like you and me. He doesn't see things as we do. He isn't comfortable with sin and the way things are. *He fights*. But not against you, as satan wants you to think. But for you. That you may have the better, the new, the different.

But here's the thing: He can't give that to you through miracles. He can't give that to you through a show of power. He can't give that to you with a new worship and service. There's only one way: **you have to die and rise**. Old sinner you, old comfortable-with-sin you, old it's okay-no problem-don't worry about it you, has to die, and a new man be raised to a new life.

But here's the next thing: while you can die, you can't raise yourself. You can pummel yourself, discipline yourself, and kill yourself by working yourself to the bone to try to beat your sin, and maybe you'll even get somewhere with that. But you can't rise to that new life, that different life, that holy and sinless life that is better. All you can do is kill

the old.

So Jesus came to raise you to that life. So to do so, He enters your life, your sin, your death, He joins you and all that you are to Himself, so that when He rises from the dead, you rise with Him. You rise to that new life, that different life, that better life, with Him. That as Paul said in the Epistle today: *that just as in Adam all die, so in Christ Jesus all might be made alive*. In Adam we sin; in Christ we are made righteous. One man got us into this mess, and one man gets us out.

And so by faith you are joined to Christ Jesus. What's yours is His and what's His is yours. You are baptized into His death and resurrection. He forgives you all your sins. You eat His resurrected Body and drink His resurrected Blood, that your body and blood be resurrected, too. With a resurrection that will happen fully and finally on the Last Day, but has begun already now. For just as your turning to dust isn't just the day you die but has begun already now, so your new life isn't just on the day you rise, but has begun already now. As Christ lives in you and you in Him.

And so you are different. Not the same. Not the same old, same old sinner, comfortable with the way things are. That's not who you are anymore. That's who your old sinner and his ally, satan, *want* you to be - but that's not who you really and truly are anymore. You have a new master, a new Lord - a better one - for a new you, righteous you, child of God you. Not satisfied you, but looking to Jesus you, to receive His gifts you, and to live for Him you. That's who you are. That's the new life He has given you.

For Jesus fought for you, and won. He fought for you in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. He fought for you on the cross. And He is still fighting for you and sending His angels to swoop in and minister to you. The battle goes on, and we fight, but knowing that the outcome is not in doubt. Our Saviour has risen victorious, and so will you.

So no need to make yourself uncomfortable with hairshirts, deprivation, and all those things people in the past have tried to use to overcome their sin. You already have someone who has done that for you. Instead, be uncomfortable and unsatisfied with your sin by looking to Him and the more He has for you. And receive that more often - His Word, His forgiveness, His Body and Blood, which give you so much more than just *it's okay, no problem, don't worry about it*. But give you His life, and give you His victory. And with them, you have all you need. With them, you are made new. With them, you rise. And with them, you are indeed, as we prayed, *walking through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come* (Collect of the Day).

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.