

Sermon Oculi  
February 28, 2016  
Pastor James Preus  
Trinity Lutheran Church  
Luke 11:14-28  
The Stronger Man

Satan is a strong man. He's armed to the teeth and he guards his palace with vigor to keep his goods safe. Satan also is the ruler of a kingdom. His kingdom is not divided, but united with legions of unclean spirits dedicated to the same task: the destruction of souls. Satan's kingdom is this fallen world, as our Lord Jesus calls him "the ruler of this world." (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) His palace, in which he and his demonic hordes make their dwelling, is in the hearts of people. The hosts of hell are an occupying force and they guard their spoils diligently. They will not divide, lest their kingdom be laid waste.

Jesus Christ is the Stronger Man. He works with the very finger of God, because he is God the Son himself. By God's finger he plagued the Egyptians with lice and flies, and with that same finger of might he evicts demons from their homes. There is no doubt that Christ can beat-up Satan and his lackeys. Christ is God himself, yet how he does it is remarkable. He could simply cast Satan and his angels to hell for all eternity and create a new world for himself with glorious angels serving him and singing his praises. Yet, out of love for *you* and the rest of mankind, he did it the hard way.

Christ entered the world and became a lowly servant, taking on human flesh. He hid his divine glory as he walked among this occupied world conversing with the captives within. Sinful man was not only a captive in Satan's kingdom, but they became culprits. They worked with and for Satan, to do evil, to blaspheme God, even to be called sons of disobedience and children of Satan. Yet love compelled our God and Savior not to cast all sinners into hell. Instead, he lived with them and *for* them. He loved them, taught

them, healed them, fed them, and comforted them. He called them by name and blessed them. Finally, Christ laid down his life for them. In a strange battle unlike any other, Christ fought Satan in the only way that wouldn't damn humanity. Jesus took our place not only under the law, but also under captivity of Satan. And as men pierced his sinless flesh and as Satan tormented his righteous soul, God the Father extracted payment for the sins of all mankind through his death. The unanswered question to Christ's cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is, "So that I do not have to forsake my children held captive in Satan's kingdom. By your blood the evil foe will be defeated and my children will be freed from the bondage of sin, eternal death, and Satan's power."

So Satan's kingdom is not only laid waste. Not only is he bound and cast out of his palace. But he loses the spoils he fought so diligently to keep. Those spoils are your souls, held in God's Fatherly hand, rescued by the blood of Christ. Your soul is not only rescued from Satan's hand, but also delivered from hell and forgiven before God.

Now Christ accomplished the devil's fall through his death and resurrection. By Christ's death and resurrection from the dead, God justified all sinners. Yet this justification, that is this declaration of God's good pleasure, is only received through *faith* in Christ. The finger of God must work on each of you individually, to cast out Satan and rescue you. That finger of God is the Gospel; the Word of God, which proclaims Christ's death and resurrection. The Gospel is the Good News that God *loves you*; that he forgives you of all your sins, no matter how embarrassing or damning. The Good News is the word of God that frees you from Satan's bonds and gives you eternal life in heaven.

And *this* is why our Lord says, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and *keep it*." The word of God evicts Satan and unclean spirits. Yet, when an

unclean spirit is cast out it searches a new place of rest. Then it decides to return to its former lodging and finding it swept clean, he brings more demons, more evil than himself to cause more havoc than before. This is why you don't just need to hear God's word once and keep it for a while. You need God's word constantly. You must treasure it in your heart always. When God's Word dwells in your heart, so does the Holy Spirit! As St. Paul says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?" With the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, no evil spirits can enter in.

Talk of Satan and evil spirits makes many uncomfortable. With Hollywood's fascination with demonic possession and the paranormal, many think of the devil and spirits as pure superstition. But don't let movies and popular opinion shape your faith and cause you to be unaware. Satan is real and so are the demonic hosts. We confess in the Nicene Creed, "I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." Those invisible things you confess to believe every week are the invisible spirits of God's creation, both his loyal angels and the fallen angels, who now fight against his Church. And when you pray, "deliver us from evil" in the Lord's prayer, you pray that God would deliver you from the Evil One, Satan himself, who seeks your destruction.

It is important for the Christian to be able to identify the attacks of the devil. You have been given a weapon against these attacks, the very finger of God that can cast out Satan, so it is unwise to let yourself be caught off guard. When Satan attacks, his goal is to destroy your faith in Christ. He will do this by leading you to sin, to indulge in your sinful flesh, and to grow comfortable in his kingdom, which we call the world.

Satan is clever. And he's good at lying. He doesn't just tempt you into gross sins like theft, murder and adultery. He's creative. He'll attack the very word of God to cause false belief. He'll encourage you to accept a part, but not the whole. He'll attack your faith in chunks, methodically questioning so-called "non-essentials" until the basis of your faith is doubted. He'll encourage you to doubt God's promises. He'll lead you to despair, to deny that God loves you and that he forgives you. He'll seek to steal from you every source of comfort Christ won for you on the cross.

Yet God has given you a powerful weapon: the finger of God, which is able to drive Satan away. The finger of God first drove Satan from your heart in your Baptism, when the Holy Spirit rushed upon you to make you God's own child. And God's finger continues to afflict Satan and keep him at bay through the means of grace. When Christ is preached as crucified and risen, Satan must flee, because God's power to save comes directly from Christ's crucifixion for the sins of the world and his victorious resurrection from the dead.

Christ invaded Satan's kingdom when he was conceived of the Virgin Mary. He won the war when he cried, "It is finished!" from the cross. By his descent into hell, he declared his victory to the devil and his congress of fallen angels, telling them that their time is short. And every time someone is baptized into Christ's death, the finger of God evicts another demonic insurgent. Every time a heart believes the forgiving words that come from Jesus alone, Satan's rebel army retreats. And every time a sinner flees from his sin, praying "Lead me out of temptation and deliver me from evil" God yanks the chain fastened around Satan's neck.

Satan lost. The Stronger Man, Christ Jesus forced him out. He did this by his sacrificial death. And although Satan has met his doom, he still attacks, bites, and kills. Yet the finger of God, that powerful word of forgiveness, comfort, and atonement, drives the devil out. And he will continue to be driven out until our Lord returns with trumpet sound, to lead the host of captives safely to their heavenly home. Then will Satan and all fallen angels be sent to hell forever, with those who reject the Gospel. And Satan will never hold a child of God captive again, nor will his kingdom ever stand united. The proclamation of that great Scandinavian Lutheran hymn will come to fruition,

The kingdom Satan founded

Shall now be overthrown,

For Christ its fall hath sounded,

And through His pow'r alone

Shall Satan meet his doom,

And be for aye confounded;

He from the souls he wounded

Shall flee in fear and gloom.

Amen.