

Second Sunday after Trinity

June 17, 2012

Sermon Text: First Peter 5:8-11

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Dear Children of God,

We see it in movie theaters, popular television programs and in the cartoons of this country's magazines and newspapers. He's portrayed as a supposedly loveable character; what with his cute red one-piece suit, complete with two little horns and a pitchfork. But is this an accurate portrayal of the devil? Or is this characterization itself actually a work of the devil?

So common is this portrayal of a seemingly harmless devil-character in our culture, that we've probably all seen him at one time or another pictured sitting upon a woefully indecisive person's left shoulder; coolly encouraging his subject to quit listening to his conscience (often pictured as a little angel); to stop being such a wimp and "go for it." And so the devil is consistently characterized as a positive influence in the person's life. In the world's popular stories of fantasy, this devilish character almost always is credited with being responsible for bringing about a change for the better in the person to whom he gives his advise. But is this an accurate portrayal of the devil? Or is this characterization itself actually a work of the devil?

Then each October in many stores we see the little red devil costumes for children. Some parents actually believe it's harmless fun and rather cute to dress their children up as a little devil. "After all, (they allow themselves to be convinced) the devil is just a cartoon character!"

But is he really? Is the devil really only a character of fantasy, completely incapable of harming anyone? Or does he really exist?

And, if he is real and he can harm us, how can the Christian defend against him and his attacks?

Today from God's Word we would be instructed:

Firstly: What is the true nature of the Devil?

Secondly: What is the nature of the Devil's attacks? and

Thirdly: Wherein lies our ability to resist and triumph over the Devil's attacks

According to the Holy Word of God, the truth of the matter is this: Contrary to most of media's portrayals and popular opinion of our day, the Devil is real. God says he is real.

Our text warns us the devil is our enemy; therefore he does indeed exist, for God would not warn us of something that does not exist, nor does God lie.

You see the devil was created as one of the many of God's angel's. He is a created spirit, just as all angels. Contrary to what some people believe, he was not created evil; but, as all angels created during the six days of creation, he was created positively good.

This we know, for while the Bible does not tell us when he was created, we do know that he was a part of creation by the end of the sixth day when God pronounced His verdict of "very good" upon all that had been created.

The devil however, along with other lesser spirits, fell away from God into sin. Scripture does not indicate precisely when this fall into sin took place, but we do know it was sometime before the devil's subtle temptation of Eve and the subsequent fall of man into sin, which brought spiritual darkness and the righteous condemnation of God upon all of mankind.

The devil and his angels had, in their sin, thus rebelled against God; and so were cast out of heaven.

As to the characteristics of the devil, the Bible describes him in Genesis 3:1 and Second Corinthians as 'subtle', full of trickery. Thus, in the temptation of man in the Garden of Eden, we are given evidence that the devil indeed possesses rather cunning intelligence and will.

Though the devil is not flesh and blood, he is able to react with the physical world-- material things. In Matthew 4:5, where the Holy Spirit through the disciple relates the Temptation of Christ, we read that the devil takes Christ' into the holy city and sets him on a pinnacle of the temple. We cannot understand how this interaction between what is spirit and what is physical can take place, but the Bible relates that it happened, therefore we accept it on faith.

That the devil also possesses great strength is also made known to us. Matthew 12:29 describes the devil as "a strong man". Now, this is no ordinary human strength, but a strength that far transcends the strength of even the strongest man on earth.

Yes, the devil indeed has great power, but he cannot perform miracles such as creating new things or raising the dead. He has no knowledge of future events, nor can he read the mind of any man; for these are all powers which are God's alone. The devil's power never supercedes that of the Creator, but is rather at all times subordinate to the power of God.
What a comfort this should be to us all!

The two main reasons those things the devil does sometimes appears to humans to be miracles are because (1) man lacks a complete understanding of the true magnitude of the power and abilities of the devil and (2) the sinful willingness of those who reject Christ as their Savior, to believe such signs and lying wonders, such as are accomplished by the power of the devil through the Antichrist, the Roman Papacy.

These "lying signs and wonders" God allows, according to Second Thessalonians 2:9-12, *"... because they (the unbelievers) receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."*

While the devil cannot read man's mind, nor divine the future, he is able to draw conclusions and form an opinion from daily events and the many indications of an individual's weaknesses. He can then act and react with the utmost cunning evil trickery he can muster to tempt you to sin and thus turn your focus away from the goal of heaven.

And so, since his rebellion against God, the devil has used his great strength and his terrible cunning intellect and will, not for the good to which he was originally created, but wholly in his continued rebellion and hatred against God and anything that is God's.

Thus, as our text states, your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. The unbeliever is not the prey of this, the devil's most diabolical hunt.

For those who do not believe the Gospel are already thinking and doing the will of the devil. Their very denial of the devil's existence and his most evil terrible power is; in fact, a deception worked in their minds by the devil himself.

They who have not yet heard the Gospel, or have already rejected it, are in complete utter spiritual darkness, just as we were, before the Grace of God delivered us from the power of the devil through faith in Christ Jesus. As we read in Ephesians 2:1-2:

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."

Yes, the unbeliever is already completely in the devil's power and so he remains seemingly unconcerned of the danger to which his soul is subject. That the unbelievers are under the control of the devil does not in any way relieve them of their personal responsibility for their sin nor does it destroy the freedom of man from coercion to commit any evil. Scripture clearly teaches the natural, unregenerate man willfully rejects the Gospel and gladly does that which is evil.

No, you and I, as children of God; we who are God the Father's dear children through the gift of the forgiveness of sins and thus heirs with Christ to the unspeakable glories which await all believers in heaven, we, Christ's Church, are the target of the devil's attacks.

The devil wishes to destroy us and he will stop at nothing in the pursuit of that goal. With great cunning, he seeks to harm us in our minds and bodies through disease, worry, doubt, fear, and by causing those within his control to negatively affect our temporal blessings, through sins of commission and sins of omission against us in order to divert our attention from the Word of God and thus tempt us to sin.

We have many examples set before us in Scripture that show us the evil nature of these attacks. The Bible tells us of various sicknesses of the body and mind as being from the devil.

We have before us many instances of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, how during His earthly ministry He cast out evil spirits from those physically crippled and otherwise afflicted with blindness and other diseases within their minds and/or bodies, and affecting immediate healing from these many afflictions at His word alone.

Reading the book of Job, we become intimately acquainted with the terrible loss and utter grief Job endures as he is subjected to the working of the devil.

From the loss of his earthly possession and the horrible deaths of his beloved sons and daughters, to desertion by his closest friends and the sinful advice he receives from his own wife to "*curse God and die*", to the attack of the devil upon Job's own flesh in the form of terrible pus-weeping sores.

All these attacks were designed to ultimately destroy the faith of a man who placed all his hope and all his trust in God. And yet, by God's grace, Job persevered in the faith and in the end God blessed Job with temporal blessings two times greater than he possessed before the devil's assault.

The devil is also the source of all doctrinal error within church bodies. As part of his continuing war against the Christian Church, the devil ever continues to work within those who bring false doctrine into her midst. For he is more than happy to invite man's reasoning into the mix, to twist and pervert the Word of God to cultivate the cancer of error among the believers, and thus lead those simple in faith away from their Savior.

It is also the devil who works the government's persecution and oppression of the family and the Church founded on the Word of God. Through the government's support of evil organizations that promote anti-Christian policies and programs which almost militantly seek to advance spiritual unionism, abortion, feminism, self-love, hedonism, and (most recently), homosexual 'marriage' and the like; the devil seeks to divide God-fearing families and destroy faithfulness to the whole Truth of God's Word.

The devil's aim is thereby to weaken our faith and gain victory in one more battle in his war against the Church of God. And so, as it was with Job, so it is with us as well.

So, dear Christians, keep a clear head and watch!

Are you, or is someone you know, afflicted with an illness of mind or body?

Have you, or someone you know, suffered loss of material goods, loved ones, or the loyalty of friends?

Are you persecuted by the world because you hold steadfastly to God's Word as Truth?

Do you suffer, perhaps even at the hands of members of your own family, because of your uncompromising belief in your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and because you strive to walk, not after the ways of this world, but with the Spirit of Light and Love?

Know that you are not alone. These things will we and our fellow Christians suffer but for a little time. And be doubly sure of this: what we Christians suffer in this life cannot compare to the glories, which are reserved for us in heaven through Christ. Soon the Lord of our faith and the Savior of our souls, Jesus Christ, shall return for His Bride, the Church, and He shall exalt us! For then we shall be made wholly perfect with glorified bodies to live with Him in His Kingdom forever and ever. And what a happy day that shall be!

Till then, dear Christians; be strong in the faith!

And become stronger in the faith whereunto you are called!

Spend time in hearing, reading, and studying the Word each and every day and thus you shall ...

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints...” (Eph.6:11-18)

So then, it is not by anything we merit by our works, but it is God who works Saving Faith in us through the Word and Sacrament and thereby gives us the ability to resist the temptation of our enemy, the devil. Likewise, through His Word, He promises to strengthen and sustain us in the face of the devil's worst attacks upon our life and faith.

When you are tempted to sin, with all due haste turn to the Word of God for strength to resist the attack. Cling to the sure hope, which is yours through faith in Christ Jesus. And in ALL things, in ALL circumstances; give humble thanks in heartfelt prayer to your most gracious Father; who loves you so very, very much.

My friends, cast all your worries and the cares of this world upon Him, for He cares for you.

Then shall you boldly proclaim with the Psalmist: *“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp*

against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord.”

And now, may the Peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.