

Epiphany 4 1/28/18
Mark 1:21-28 B

“WHAT HAVE YOU TO DO WITH US, JESUS OF NAZARETH? HAVE YOU COME TO DESTROY US? I KNOW WHO YOU ARE – THE HOLY ONE OF GOD.”

Inquiring minds want to know what Pastor was doing all week, so I will tell you. I was reading, like every week. The book that has my attention is “The Real Heroes of Telemark,” which tells the World War II account of the allies destroying a heavy water plant in Norway. Heavy water was used in the production of atomic bombs, and the fear was that if the Nazis were able to make enough heavy water, they would be able to make an atomic bomb. It is truly a remarkable story of what has been called the most successful act of sabotage in all of World War II.

I like to read books like this, as you probably know, because of the heroism of common people, but also because of the strategy involved. It’s easy for us now because we know the story ends, but the battles still needed to be fought.

Epiphany. God has appeared to us in Jesus of Nazareth and John teaches us, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the work of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8). In our battles with the devil we are helpless SO CHRIST CAME TO WIN THE WAR FOR US.

You know how the fight with the devil is all too well. The 3rd chapter of Genesis recounts for us how the evil foe crept into God's creation on his belly. He led our first parents into sin with the seemingly simple temptation, “Did God really say...” That’s what the father of all lies does. He attacks the very words of God. And you know how He does it all too well. “Did God really say” that He is in control of all His creation, so you worry and

stew and fret. “Did God really say” that He works all things together for your good, so you trust in lady luck, just in case. “Did God really say” that He forgives your sins as far as the east is from the west, so you doubt, and ask again and again – and again – for forgiveness for the same sin. “Did God really say” that you are to forgive your neighbor as He has forgiven you in Christ, so you keep a record of wrongs, and hate, and refuse to be reconciled. “Did God really say,” marriage was a blessing, so you ogle and desire that woman, and if only she was your wife, your life would be oh-so-perfect. “Did God really say” you are not to speak evil of your neighbor, but gossip is so much fun! “Did God really say” you are to be content with the life and stuff God has given you, and instead you are jealous and envious when you see what your neighbor has.

Then, of course, the father of all lies, becomes your chief accuser after you given in to the temptation and sinned. And the arrows come, “You call yourself a Christian.” “God is going to get you this time.” The arrows of guilt and shame and regret hurt. You know what the Psalmist means that there is no health in his bones because of the guilt of his sin. You’ve ached because of your sin, haven’t you?

The devil has terrific power. However, the devil can harm no one who is protected by Jesus Christ, because Jesus is more powerful than the devil. We learn in Luther’s *Small Catechism*:

123. Why was it necessary for our Savior to be true God?

"Christ had to be true God in order that

A. His fulfilling of the Law, His life, suffering, and death might be a sufficient ransom for all people;

B. HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO OVERCOME DEATH AND THE DEVIL FOR US."

We were helpless, so Jesus came to defeat the devil for us, in our place, so that we might reign victorious over the evil foe.

The devil used sin to hold us hostage. But Jesus, the Lamb of God, carried our sin the cross. On the cross, the Paschal Victim cried in His dying anguish: "It is finished." Praise be to God! The devil's hold on us was finished. All of our sin is gone in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. You have been set free, Dear Child of God! The devil could no longer hold us hostage with sin. The Bible says it this way, "Since...the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil (He 2:14).

The Apostle Paul writes, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col 1)." That's what happened in your baptism. In that new birth of water and Word, you were united to Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection, so that Christ's eternal victory over the devil becomes your own victory.

The war for you and for your salvation has been won. Jesus crushed the head of the evil foe on Calvary. When Christ returns in all of His glory, He will cast the evil foe forever and eternity into hell. But, he will not give up without a fight. The devil never stops fighting for your soul. "Be sober-minded; be watchful." St. Peter writes, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). The devil is constantly on the prowl, seeking to allure and entrap you away from Jesus Christ, to take you to hell for eternity.

The Good News of the Christian faith is that just as Jesus saved the man in the synagogue in Capernaum from the unclean spirit, Jesus saves

you.

This is a reading from Scripture that has always fascinated me. Where is the demon-possessed man? In the synagogue. Mark makes it clear that the people knew him; they were accustomed to have him in the synagogue with them. But, the human babbling of the scribes was helpless to overpower and drive away the devil. Think about this: The Scribes were experts in the Old Testament, the Scriptures which told us the Messiah would come to save God's people from sin, death, and the devil. But, the Scribes ignored God's message in the Scriptures and preached to the people a list of man-made doctrines, a list of "do this and don't do that," which made the people smug in their works-righteous comparisons to their neighbors. But, when Christ came to the synagogue, the difference was tremendous! He immediately delivered the demons from the man. Only Christ is more powerful than the devil. Only Jesus can conquer and crush the devil.

We live in a very restless age. Hearts that do not rest in Christ long and search for peace in all the wisdom, beliefs, and advice of this present age. But, pop psychology, positive thinking, "I'm OK, you're OK" babble, does not conquer and drive away the devil. This is why we pray as we have in our Collect for this Sunday,

"Almighty God, You know we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright. Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations."

God does strengthen and protect us here at this Altar when the absolution is spoken; at the font when water is poured and His Word is spoken; at this table when He gives you His body and blood to eat and

drink; in our Sunday School classes as our young people learn of Jesus; at your kitchen table as you and your family gladly hear God's Word. Through these means of grace, Jesus drives Satan away, just as He drove him from the man in Capernaum.

The Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus, the very Son of God, has appeared to win the victory over sin for us. In His love, He gives us His victory over the devil, and sin and death, as well, to be our very own. And He supports us in all dangers and protects from all the lies and temptations of the devil that we may remain faithful unto death, receive the crown of life and rest from all our struggles in heaven.