

Easter 7 5/24/20
1 Peter 5:6-11 A

BE SOBER-MINDED; BE WATCHFUL. YOUR ADVERSARY THE DEVIL PROWLs AROUND LIKE A ROARING LION, SEEKING SOMEONE TO DEVOUR. RESIST HIM, FIRM IN YOUR FAITH.

Today marks a most special milestone for our community because today is high school graduation. The family of Concordia rejoices with our graduates, Evan and Hope, and their families on this wondrous time in their lives. We rejoice with them, but we are not going to be able to attend their graduation ceremony because of the restrictions due to the Covid-19 virus.

The Coronavirus has meant many changes and challenges for the Class of 2020. Not just in terms of classes via the internet, sport and activities cancelled – no prom, no baseball, no spring activities of any kind. In fact, many graduates are not even having open houses. There is always uncertainty for young people at this time in their lives, but the coronavirus has brought more than the usual amount of uncertainty.

I visited with my sister this past week. She has a granddaughter graduating. She is a pretty good student, so she has applied and been accepted at several colleges, but the Coronavirus has caused uncertainty about whether or not there will even be college this fall. She is uncertain whether she should just stay home and plan to do classes online. And there is angst that she will find herself a full semester behind in her college studies. And, yes, more than a few tears have been shed because of all the uncertainty.

Uncertainty. My Dear Friends in Christ, this Sunday, the Lord's Church finds herself in an uncertain time. This past Thursday, our Lord

Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven. The promised Comforter, the Holy Spirit, has not yet come.

And, we find ourselves not just in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, but in a sinful world, with all its uncertainty and changes. How does the hymnwriter say it, "Change and decay in all around I see" [LSB 878:4]. And, you know that old saying, right? "Only wet babies like change!" It's true, isn't it? Graduates, your parents now face life without you. They've had you around for 18 years and they have grown fond of you. No matter what they might say, they will miss you. No one has to tell a widow or widower what transition is like. Or, when you lose a sibling. Your body wears down, and you face the question of whether or not it's time to move into the nursing home; you wonder if you should continue the treatments or have that one more surgery. You've lost your job, but the mortgage still needs to be paid and medicine needs to be purchased.

And in that uncertainty, you try to get your bearings. You wake up in the morning, wondering, "What do I do now? Will I ever be free from pain? Will the loneliness end? Will the fear ever go away?" And, guess what? The devil laughs with glee.

That's right. I said the devil. When because of circumstances, you get dragged into the depths of depression and despair, when you get pulled into anger and orneriness, when hope is drained from your life and you begin to feel you just can't go on, the devil is snickering because his goal is to crush you, and it's working. It's called "spiritual warfare."

You're not just battling the uncertainty of tomorrow. In fact, no matter what your struggle, whatever your battle, it isn't merely against physical illness, or family conflict, or personal despair. Peter writes in our lesson, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like

a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). The Apostle Paul reinforces this truth when he said in Ephesians 6: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph. 6:10-11, NIV).

The 12th chapter of Revelation 12 paints a powerful picture of the devil striving against us, even as God is always at work on our behalf. The devil is pictured as a fierce dragon being thrown out of heaven, down to earth. The blood of Jesus defeated his sabotaging efforts, once and for all. But even as Jesus waits to draw people to Himself before He comes again, Satan wants to drag as many as possible to hell. Verse 17 says this, "Then the dragon became furious...and went off to make war on...those who kept the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 12:17).

It's a spiritual battle. Major temptations and minor problems; the crushing blows of our sin-broken world and the little things that drive you to lash out; world catastrophes, personal frustrations -- it's not just coincidence, hassle, and inconvenience. The devil uses all of it to pull you away from your Savior Jesus. He wants to steal your hope and derail your life; He wants to keep you from a life that glorifies and serves God.

But, Good News for you, Dear Child of God, is that your Father will not allow that to happen. For you and for your salvation, He sent His only-begotten Son into this world to redeem you from sin, death, and the devil. Look at the words that Jesus prayed in our Gospel, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do."

Jesus accomplished the work His Father sent Him to do by shouldering every sin of worry and doubt; every sin of your fearing men and the future more than God; every time you believed the lies of the father of

all lies; and every accusation of Satan that would separate you from God, and carried them all to the cross. By His innocent suffering and death on that cross, He paid the price for your sin and guilt, so that you are forgiven. Jesus crushed the head of the devil to once and for all silence all his ugly accusations. And then, Jesus rose from the dead. God's Word rings true, "The prince of this world now stands condemned" (Jn 16:11, NIV).

Cleansed in the waters of baptism, we now walk in new life with our Savior -- all the way to life everlasting.

You don't have to be a baseball fan to know who Yogi Berra is. Yogi is perhaps as famous for his "Yogi-isms," as he is for playing baseball. He once famously said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." If only life were that easy, right?

Jesus once said, "My sheep hear my voice...and the follow Me" (Jn 10: 27). You hear the voice of Jesus in His Word. Martin Luther said,

"Before an untried and inexperienced Christian has learned his lesson, the devil has so disturbed him that he must fear and tremble and does not know which way to turn. Therefore we must learn to **cling** to Christ's Word and comfort alone..."

Jesus has won the victory over sin, death, and the devil for us and He leads us through each step of life. He gives us life, hope, and strength in His Word. That is important to remember and cherish, Dear Child of God, because you know life ... life in a fallen world with all its changes, challenges, and uncertainties.

When you're tired, when your life is demanding, when people aren't cooperating with you, or when circumstances are beyond your control, you want to feel better. It's okay to want to feel better, to be free from pain and to have peace and joy in your life; but, too often, the strong desire to feel better can lead to the desires of the flesh: lashing out in anger at someone

who is frustrating you, seeking solace in the abuse of drugs or alcohol, escaping in pornography, being unfaithful and unkind to the people in your life.

You can see what the devil is doing, can't you? He offers escape, but it's not meant to help you, it is meant to destroy you and the people in your life. These alleged fixes from the devil are only temporary and, in fact, are quite destructive. Once the feelings fade, regret and pain come rushing in. That's why you need Jesus. Jesus doesn't call you to escape; He calls you to peace in the midst of the struggle. He doesn't call you to despair; He calls you to real hope! He says, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28-29). Jesus provides rest, restoration, peace, and hope. Jesus gives comfort, healing, strength -- yes, even growth through times of adversity.

In all the uncertainty of earthly life, we take comfort and strength and assurance in the words of Scripture,

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be dominion forever and ever” (1 Pe 5:10-11).