

Easter 7 5/21/23
1 Peter 4:12-17; 5:6-11 A

SERMON TEXT, EPISTLE LESSON, 1 PETER, 5TH CHAPTER

Last Sunday, we heard the words of Jesus, “I will not leave you as orphans”. Yet, it is easy for us to feel like orphans in this vale of tears. Today marks an interesting time in the life of Christ’s Church. Our Lord Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father; the Promised Comforter has not yet come. Yet, we can rejoice and be brave: even though we feebly struggle against the evil one, Christ is with us.

Our lesson reads,

Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 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.

Peter knew from his own experience that the devil was a roaring lion seeking to devour. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus had warned him of Satan's intent to "sift" him (Lk 22:31), to devour him. Peter thought he was stronger than that roaring lion. He failed to watch, and he failed to pray, and as a result he failed. Three times he denied knowing Jesus. He learned how quickly fear can melt away faith, how quickly that roaring lion can devour us. He learned how tough it is to be a Christian when the devil is roaring in your ear like a lion.

We know that the devil is a roaring lion seeking to devour us, because we’ve experienced it, too. With his lies and schemes, the devil tries to tempt you into sin and draw you away from the Lord. He will tempt you to turn hurt feelings into resentments, small slights into final separations. In subtle ways, he will try to reorder your priorities. He will

make you think it is better to love the things of this world more than Jesus. He will especially attack you in those moments when you are down and weak. When your knees are scraped and your elbows bloody, He will make you think God doesn't care; that He has forgotten you; or even worse, that God is some mean-spirited ogre who sits in heaven and delights in your pain. He will make you worry and fear about tomorrow, as though God is not powerful enough to hold the future in His hands. And, He will not quit, no matter how old you get. Always, even to your last breath, you will be a stalked person. He will lie to you, tempt you, and do whatever is necessary to destroy you and your faith, to devour you. Always there will be struggle. It is no joke to take sides against the devil and to be his mighty, lifelong enemy.

“[Cast] all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you,” Peter writes (v. 7). That little sentence sums up the whole Gospel. God cares for us. The proof is in Jesus and the cross.

Jesus' dying on the cross for us -- taking the burden of our sin into His own body and soul and standing in the place of our judgment -- shows us how much God does indeed love and care for us. At times things may happen that could lead us to think that the Lord doesn't care about us. But He does. And the cross stands tall and sure as proof of it. That is why Peter can confidently tell us to “Cast all your anxiety on him”. Don't be afraid. Christ has conquered in the strife, crushing the head of our adversary the devil and defeated our greatest enemy, death itself, so that sin, death, and the devil have no hold, no mastery, over you.

You have this certainty, this joy, this hope and strength because you are baptized into Christ. Shame and guilt need not disturb you. Satan can accuse you no more. Death cannot make you afraid. The paradise of

heaven is yours because you are God's own child.

And, it is precisely because you are a child of God that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour you. What I mean is this: the devil is especially out to devour you, baptized child of God. You're the trophy he wants in his hatred of the Lord. Unbelievers are already lost, so you're the one in the cross-hairs and your adversary focuses all of his hatred on you!

Notice that Peter says devour you. That's an important word to note. The devil does not prowl to scratch or claw. His intent is not to bite or merely to maim. He wants to devour you; to swallow you whole, just as the Red Sea waters swallowed up the Egyptian army.

Jesus taught us that a disciple is not above his master. Baptized into Jesus, everything of His is ours. His resurrection, His ascension, His heaven. And, his cross. As the world rejected and hated Him, it will do the same to us. As the devil sought to devour Jesus, he will devour us. "Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you, as though something strange were happening to you," Peter says. It came to Jesus, and you will come to you, Child of God.

Don't be surprised; and – and – there is no need for us to be afraid. Our God is more powerful than both the persecuting world and the stalking devil. Our King, our Lord Jesus Christ, is ascended, triumphant and victorious. "For us fights the valiant One." He is not only for us, He is with us.

I have told you before of my niece. When she was about 4 or 5, we visited the Salt Lake City zoo. At the lion's cage, my brother-in-law picked her up so that she could see the lions. At the very moment he picked her up so she could get a good look, one king of the jungle woke from his nap,

lifted himself onto his four legs, shook the drowsiness from his head, and let out roar to let everyone know he was the king of the jungle.

Conniption. You've heard that word, right? That's what my little niece had -- a conniption. She was absolutely terrified. But, between her and that lion was not only a metal fence, but also a Plexiglas shield. That lion could roar and frighten her, but he could not hurt or harm her.

It is important that we remember that Christ has won the victory, crushing Satan's head and removing the sting of death. The devil can roar and thunder, but he can harm us none. The flood waters came, the wind and waves beat upon the ark, but Noah was safe. So, the storms may come, but we are safe in Christ. "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," Peter says.

That is why we can sing and rejoice with the Psalmist,

I will sing of steadfast love and justice

To you, O Lord, I will make music.

Know that the LORD, He is God!

It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people,
And the sheep of His pasture.

For the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever,
And His faithfulness to all generations.

The devil is a prowling lion seeking to devour us, but do not be afraid. We are victorious in Christ. By His dying and rising, He has silenced that roaring lion. And, as He has ascended into heaven, we know that we will ascend with Him.