

“HAVE YOU COME TO DESTROY US? I KNOW WHO YOU ARE – THE HOLY ONE OF GOD.” BUT JESUS REBUKED HIM, SAYING, “BE SILENT AND COME OUT OF HIM!”

“Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me,” the Rev. Dr. Luther teaches us to pray in the morning and evening prayer. For most people today, the devil is nothing more than a silly, old superstition; at best, a silly, little man in a red suit with horns, that can be easily laughed off.

But, Luther knew Satan to be a very real and dangerous adversary because he knew the truth of Scripture, *Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pt 5:8)*. The Apostle Paul teaches us of living a Christian life, *We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12)*. And let us never forget, Our Lord Jesus Himself, immediately after His baptism, *was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Mt 4:1)*. So, Luther teaches us to pray that God would guard and keep us so that the old, evil foe cannot not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

Rejoice and be glad, My Christian Friends, in this Epiphany season. **THE HOLY ONE OF GOD HAS APPEARED TO CRUSH THE DEVIL’S HEAD.**

In our Gospel lesson today, *all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him (v. 40)*. Among those who were sick were the demon possessed. To our 21st century, American ears, the very

idea of demon possession sounds **strange** because we, more than likely, have never encountered a person possessed by demons. Honestly, the closest most of us will ever be to demon possession is a Hollywood movie. But, at the time of Jesus and the early years of the Church, demon possession was something they lived with every day. By casting out the demons which bound people, Jesus was teaching them -- as He teaches us this Sunday in our lesson -- that He is “very God of very God” and He more powerful than the devil.

Demon possession, sickness, sin, and death are all signs that the creation is in bondage to sin. But, Epiphany teaches us that Jesus has appeared to free those in bondage to sin. Jesus frees those in bondage by rebuking that which binds them. He rebukes the fever of Peter’s mother-in-law and it leaves her. He rebukes demons who call Him “the Son of God” because they know Him to be the Christ, and those demons come out.

Today, our lesson looks **forward** to the cross, where Jesus will once and for all crush the head of the devil and free all of creation from the bondage of sin, death, and Satan. All exorcisms point to the release from Satan’s bondage through Jesus’ death and resurrection, the ultimate exorcism of the world.

No, in our day, Satan does not typically take control of a person’s body. But, let us not make the mistake of believing that he is not active against us today. In our day, he works not in an open way, but in a much trickier, more sinister manner.

The 2nd Commandment reads, “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.” We commonly think of the 2nd Commandment telling us not to use profanity. Which is true, it does forbid all unwholesome talk from our mouths. But, in the Large Catechism, Luther teaches what the

real intent of God is in this Commandment: “The greatest abuse, however, occurs in spiritual matters, which pertain to the conscience, when false preachers arise and peddle their lying nonsense as the Word of God.”

I. In the Garden, the father of all lies led us into sin and death, with the simple words, “Did God really say...” Today, the father of all lies still whispers, “Did God really say,” to make us doubt and not believe God’s Word.

We expect God to forgive us, but we remain angry, refuse to be reconciled, and keep a good record of those who have offended us. We rightly point out the sin of homosexuality, but see nothing wrong when we laugh at off-color jokes. You would never think of breaking into your neighbor’s house and take their stuff, but you rejoice, greatly, when misfortune strikes your neighbor and “they get theirs”. We want love and popularity, but have no problem using our tongue to defame our neighbor. Being a Christian means believing the 1st Commandment, but we believe God should do things our way, right away, and when He doesn’t, we take our ball and go home and pout.

II. “Epiphany” means “appearance”. The Apostle St. John teaches us the Good News we celebrate this season of the Church Year, *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the work of the devil (1 Jn 3:8)*.

Jesus came to us, humbling Himself to be born of a Virgin and then was baptized to take our sin to be His very own and our death to be His very own, and He carried them all to Calvary’s cross. There, He died and, by His death, He destroyed *the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (He 2:14-15)*.

III. And in the new birth of our Baptism, Jesus gives us His victory over

the devil to be our very own. By virtue of Your baptism, you live in Jesus and Jesus lives in you. The Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus has not left us defenseless against the attacks of the evil foe today.

It is no joke to take sides against the devil. We who have been baptized into Christ must certainly count on having the devil and all his demons as our might, lifelong enemy. We must be certain that they will inflict every possible misfortune and grief upon us. For where, God's Word is preached, taught, and believed, there the devil will be.

The old, evil foe cannot bear to have anyone teach or believe the truth of God's Word. It pains him to no end when his lies are exposed and he is driven from our hearts. So, he raves and rages with all his power and might against us, marshaling all his forces against us, enlisting even the help of this world and our own flesh as his allies against our faith in God's good and gracious will. Our sinful flesh is in itself vile and inclined to evil, even after we have been baptized and are one with Christ. This present age is perverse and wicked. This is the devil's only goal, his sole desire and purpose, is to drive us from our Savior Christ. For this, He strives day and night, using all the lies, tricks, ways, and means he can think of.

In the 3rd petition of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In our Little Catechism, we learn:

How is God's will done? God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die.

Rejoice and be glad, Saints of God. Your Father in heaven hears and answers your prayer. He breaks and hinders the evil plan and purpose

of the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. And, He strengthens and keeps you firm your faith until you die.

This He does through His Word, the spoken Word and the visible Word of the Sacraments, that God does His work in us, bringing us to faith in Christ, and strengthening and keeping us in that faith, until the day He comes to take us to be with Him in heaven.

Yes, the devil is a roaring lion prowling seeking to devour us. But, Jesus has crushed head, defeating the evil one once and for all. Through His Word, Jesus gives His victory to us that it may be our own victory. Satan can roar, and try to frighten and unsettle us, but he can harm us none.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.