

The Third Sunday in Lent

St. Luke 11:14-28: "Jesus Christ Is Lord."

March 3/4, 2018 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, You have sent Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh, that He might overcome the devil, and defend us poor sinners against the adversary: We give thanks to You for Your merciful help, and we beseech You to attend us with Your grace in all temptations, to preserve us from carnal security, and by Your Holy Spirit to keep us in Your Word in Your fear, that we may be delivered from the enemy, and obtain eternal salvation; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (ELH, p. 153)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Now [Jesus] was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," while others, to test Him, kept seeking from Him a sign from heaven. / But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. / "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters. / "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first." / As He said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts at which You nursed!" But He said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, "the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1Tim. 6:15), dear fellow redeemed:

This year's Catechism Class students just took a test on the doctrine of the Trinity as we confess it in the Apostles' Creed. One of the things they learned and could tell you about is the two "states" of Jesus—His "State of Humiliation" and His "State of Exaltation."

His State of Humiliation stretched from His conception to His burial. During this time period, Jesus did not always and fully use the divine powers communicated to His human nature. This is how it was possible for the incarnate Son of God to learn, feel weakness, and suffer. He humbled Himself in obedience to His Father all the way to His death on the cross.

But just because He did not always and fully use His power on earth, does not mean He was powerless. We see many examples of this power—even in His State of Humiliation—in today's text. Even at Jesus' weakest points, the devil could not overcome Him.

I

Two weeks ago, we heard how the devil tried to tempt Jesus to sin while He fasted in the wilderness. With each temptation, Jesus pushed back against Satan with the powerful Word and eventually sent him packing. The devil could not hold his ground against God's Word. Now we hear about Jesus casting out a demon that had entered a man and made him mute. Many of the people who witnessed this were amazed, as they should have been.

But some of the Pharisees whispered to each other that Jesus cast out demons by the power of "Beelzebul," a name used for Satan. Notice how they did acknowledge something miraculous had happened. They saw the obvious change in the man after Jesus healed him. But they did not want to consider that Jesus could have His power from God. If He did, then they would have to admit they were wrong about their criticisms of Him all along.

The second evidence of Jesus' power after casting out the demon is that He knew the Pharisees' thoughts. What they discussed privately, He answered openly. He said that it would make no sense for Him to cast out a demon by the power of demons. Would a government official oust a friend and ally from an important position for no reason? He could gain nothing from this but a weakening of his own position. This is how Jesus characterized the foolish thinking of the Pharisees about the source of His powers, *"Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls."*

So if Jesus was not getting His power to cast out demons from the chief demon, where else could it come from than God? God's is the only power greater than the devil's. The way Jesus described this is very impressive. He said that *"it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons."* How should we understand this? Did Jesus cast out a demon like someone might flick a mosquito from his arm? Or was it like a parent who points upstairs and commands a child to "Go to your room"? These are appropriate pictures for showing how no demon can contend with Jesus.

But what Jesus especially refers to here is the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. The book of Exodus says that the Ten Commandments given to Moses on stone tablets were *"written with the finger of God"* (31:18). The Holy Spirit is the Person of the Trinity who is credited with the writing down of God's Word. 2 Peter 1:21 says, *"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."* One of our hymns from the 9th century makes this same connection. It says of the Holy Spirit: *"The sev'nfold gifts of grace are Thine, / O Finger of the Hand Divine; True Promise of the Father Thou, / Who dost the tongue with speech endow"* (ELH 10, v. 3).

Jesus makes the same connection to the Holy Spirit's work in His next statement, *"But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* How does God's kingdom come? As we learned in the Catechism, "The kingdom of God comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity" (Second Petition). Jesus did not parade around like a king during the time of His visible work on earth. The glory of His kingdom did not consist in great riches, grand palaces, and lavish parties. The glory and grandeur of His kingdom was in spiritual things, hidden from human eyes.

This is just as it is today. To the world, the Church looks so pathetic and weak. Unbelievers mock us and ask us where our loving God is when there is trouble in our lives. But *"the finger of God"* is still active and God's kingdom still comes when the Holy Spirit visits us through the Word and Sacraments. Here in these Means of Grace, heaven meets earth, and we are lifted up out of our troubles and comforted by the grace and goodness of God.

II

But the Word and Sacraments do not always seem like such a strong defense against our spiritual enemies. We feel the presence of Satan in our lives often enough. Friends turn against us. Attempts to do good are thrown back in our face. Our present feels cheerless and our future without hope. We have no doubt that the devil and demons are hard at work with all their dividing, hurting, and destroying. But where is the Lord? If He is so powerful, why does the devil seem to win so much? If He is with us always, why can't we feel His comforting presence?

The problem is not with God, but with us. It is not that the Lord is weak or uncaring or unhappy with us. He is absolutely as strong and kind and loving as He says He is. But we do not believe it. Nor do we believe that God's Word is everything He says it is. If it hit home for us what a powerful gift we have in the Word, everything about our priorities in life would change. Think of it this way: If there were a pill or a drink that could keep you from ever getting sick or injured, and all you had to do was consume it once a day, you would do it without fail.

That is what we have in the Word for our spiritual health. It is the diagnostic tool of God, *"piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart"* (Heb. 4:12). It is the way the Lord applies balm to our hurting, broken hearts. It is the way that He strengthens and builds us up, so that we cannot be overcome by the forces of evil. The devil can contend with you all day and night, and he will always have the upper hand if you stand against him alone. But he must retreat where the Word is present. There is no more powerful force for good in our hearts or in the world than the Spirit-filled Word.

But there our Bibles sit, unopened. Or the Word is preached, unheard. Or it is heard, but not taken to heart. When we are troubled or hurting, we want a solution to the problem. We want a quick and easy remedy. We want to feel that God is with us and will make everything better. But God never told us to base our faith in Him on good results or on a feeling that He is near. He told us to abide in His Word. Why? So we would know the truth, and the truth would set us free (Jn. 8:31-32). In today's text, Jesus told a woman in the crowd, *"Blessed... are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"* The word for *"keep it"* means to guard it, protect it, defend it, keep it close.

When we do that, when our hearts and minds are filled with the Spirit of God through His Word, the devil is kept away. Then he can't find a weakness to exploit. Then he is made to back down by one more powerful than he. Jesus said, *"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil."* The devil is the *"strong man,"* but Jesus is the *"one stronger."* Along with the Holy Spirit, He comes to us in all His power to conquer the devil, overcome our sin, and lead us on the victory march to heaven.

Remember that everything Jesus said about His power in today's text was when He was not making full use of it during His State of Humiliation. But now He is exalted. Now there is no more suffering for Him, no more lonely path to the cross. Now the God-Man Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. What does He do there? He intercedes for us. He speaks to the Father on our behalf. He watches over His Church. He sends His holy angels to protect us from the assaults of the devil and demons. And He prepares for His triumphant return to end the reign of sin, death, and devil for eternity.

When Jesus returns on the last day, then we will see and experience the power and glory that are known to us now only through His Word. Then all creation will stand in awe of His majesty and might, and *"every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ Is Lord"* (Phil. 2:10-11).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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