

Luke 11:14-28 (Oculi)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
March 20, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

In our Gospel text this morning we encounter Jesus, the stronger man, who overcomes Satan and takes away his armor. Then we are warned about letting our guard down, because our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. If given the chance, the unclean spirits will return, and when they do it is with a vengeance. Jesus says:

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.

The modern world wants to know nothing of Satan, the demons, or the cosmic powers over this present darkness and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12), unless in a horror movie, of course. The Bible presents for us a world of good and evil, right and wrong, light and darkness, angels and demons, God and the Devil. Jesus and all the prophets and apostles in Holy Scripture assume a supernatural world that controls what is going on in the natural world. We are characters in the unfolding drama of world history, actors in a supernatural battle which has been waged since before we were born and unless the Lord returns, will continue after our part is over. We are wrestling not just with flesh and blood but with spiritual forces which largely remain unseen. In the Scriptures, however, we see the curtain pulled back a bit and we behold the true powers of light and darkness that are contending behind the scenes.

Again, the modern world wants to know nothing of this true battle being waged. For the last few hundred years, the supernatural has been explained away and accounted for with natural explanations. Of course, many occurrences that were once attributed to the supernatural really can be explained by natural causes, at least to a point: thunder and lightning, various illnesses of

body and mind, the changing of the seasons. Occurrences once attributed solely to supernatural causes can be quite natural. Yet we ought not completely negate the supernatural. We should not fall into the trap of explaining everything away because things *can* be explained in a natural way. The supernatural always works in tandem with the natural and really cannot be separated from it, in the same way the body and soul cannot be separated. What affects the body affects the soul and what affects the soul affects the body. The natural and the supernatural, what is of nature and what is above nature, relate to each other.

People may wonder: “Ok, so if there really are demons then why don’t we experience them today? If there really is a devil, then why don’t we see any evidence?” In C.S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters*, one demon says to another: “Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. Of course, this has not always been so. We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When human beings disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us we cannot make them materialists and skeptics - at least not yet.” The point is that either fear of the demons or not believing in them at all both lead to the same place. When we are led to question the reality of the supernatural in our lives, we at the same time can be led to question He who is above nature because He created nature. God is supernatural, so if the Devil can get us to ignore the supernatural, He can also get us to ignore God.

When Christianity first comes to a place, the result is a manifest attack from the demonic. We see this on the mission field when the Gospel is first preached in a region, and we see this especially in the New Testament, where the coming of Christ is accompanied by a swell of demonic activity. But after a time the Devil switches his tactics and tries to become invisible. If he can’t trap people by fear and control then he uses other means to entice the saints. The Devil

continues working through natural means to achieve his purposes. It might not seem as dramatic as what we read in our Gospel text, but Satan works through our weak and sinful flesh, through past sins and traumatic experiences, to turn us away from God.

Take, for example, the list of sins Paul mentions in our Epistle text from Ephesians 5: sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talk, crude joking . . . because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Let no one deceive you with empty words. Everything Paul calls out as a sin can be justified by people in numerous ways. All these sins, as well as all other sins, are often considered normal human weaknesses; a laughing matter. Yet Paul calls them works of darkness, and idolatry, and behind all idolatry is the demonic. No matter what the motivation for sin, sin is sin and will be treated as such by God. Sins might arise out of our human weakness because it is what comes out of the heart that defies a person, but what is often neglected in our discussions of sin is the satanic prompting at play. The natural and the supernatural relate to each other.

In the Church today the most common place we experience the demonic and the exorcizing of demons is at Holy Baptism. In the baptismal rite there is an exorcism, which sounds like this: “the Word of God . . . teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. Therefore, depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We ask the one to be baptized: “Do you renounce the devil? Do you renounce all his works? Do you renounce all his ways?” Then comes a confession of the Christian faith in the words of the Apostles’ Creed and baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Baptism itself is an exorcism, the casting out of an unclean spirit to make way for the Holy Spirit. In Baptism, the stronger man, Jesus Christ, attacks and overcomes the strong man,

the Devil. Just as Christ defeated Satan by dying on the cross, so in Baptism Jesus applies that victory to us personally. God takes the person who was under the power and sway of the demonic and transfers that person into the kingdom of light. Jesus casts out demons by the finger of God, the Holy Spirit, and so we know that the Kingdom of God has come upon us. The armor Satan used against us was first given to us by God, our bodies and souls, eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason and all our senses. Satan uses these gifts of God against us, but then Christ comes and puts them back into His service. In this battle there is no neutrality. Either you are in the kingdom of Satan or the Kingdom of Christ. There is no middle ground, no gray area. Whoever is not with Christ is against Him and whoever does not gather with Him scatters. By faith we enter the Kingdom of Christ in Baptism. Otherwise we are subject to Satan, the ruler of this world (John 12:31).

Jesus then warns those who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit in Baptism that the war is not over. The unclean spirit might depart for a time, but it will be back with reinforcements. Again, there is no neutrality in this war. Either the unclean spirit will rule our life or the Holy Spirit will. If the unclean spirit is cast out but then we also kick out the Holy Spirit through willful sinning, then the unclean spirit will return with even more unclean spirits. That unclean spirit will find the house swept and put in good order, that is, the unclean spirit will find an empty heart ready to receive him again, a heart ready to return to the futile works of darkness. This is a constant danger for the Christian and it is why Jesus warns us about how the demons operate. We know that without defending ourselves against the attack of the enemy, the Devil will return with even more unclean spirits and the last state of that person will be worse than the first. The works of darkness will only compound.

When Christians return to the works of darkness from which Christ saved us, the unclean spirit is again given free reign. Sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talk, crude joking, and all such things are the unfruitful works of darkness which we are not to participate in but expose. In Baptism we are no longer children of darkness but children of light, and so we walk as children of light, fighting against the powers of darkness which continue to wage a war against us, both inside and out. The life of Baptism is a life of continual defense against unclean spirits, and the temptation to return to the enemy is always with us.

Yet our LORD does not leave us without weapons for the fight. “Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.” We are given the sword of the spirit, the written Word of God, as a weapon to defend and attack the onslaught of the evil foe. We have the belt of truth and the breastplate of Christ’s righteousness. We have the readiness given by the Gospel of peace, and the shield of faith to extinguish the enemy’s darts. Our helmet is Christ, who is our salvation. We have the power of prayer, knowing that the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (James 5:16), and so we pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. Our LORD gives us the weapons of the Word and the Sacraments. We defend ourselves against Satan’s attacks with the Word of God and when we fall, we return to our Baptism by confessing our sins and receiving absolution. We are healed by Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, which are given to reassure our weak consciences. Here Christ’s body and blood enter our body, and we are reminded that He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:57). In the name of Jesus, Amen. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.