

Luke 11:14–28
Oculi (Lent III)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
March 3, 2024

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,

“United we stand; divided we fall.” You might recall this old adage from American history, from the speeches of Benjamin Franklin or Abraham Lincoln. It’s a truism that people all over the world could especially learn from today. United we stand; divided we fall. This saying actually goes back to ancient Greece, to Aesop, who lived some 600 years before Jesus Christ. Next to the Bible, Martin Luther had a special place for the pagan author Aesop. In fact, at the Coburg Castle, Luther worked on translating not only the Psalms and the Prophets, but also Aesop’s fables. One of Aesop’s fables is “The Four Oxen and the Lion” and it goes like this: “A Lion used to prowl about a field in which Four Oxen used to dwell. Many a time he tried to attack them; but whenever he came near they turned their tails to one another, so that whichever way he approached them he was met by the horns of one of them. At last, however, they fell a-quarrelling among themselves, and each went off to pasture alone in a separate corner of the field. Then the Lion attacked them one by one and soon made an end of all four. United we stand, divided we fall.” Aesop includes this pithy saying as the moral of the story.

“United we stand; divided we fall” is also the moral of our Gospel Lesson this morning. Or as Jesus put it: “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.” Jesus says this first about the Kingdom of Satan. If the demons were divided against each other they wouldn’t be an issue. But the fact is, the Devil and the wicked angels are united in their attack against you, the people of God, and against all people, and most especially against

our Lord Jesus Christ. But our Lord conquers the powers of darkness and overcomes the old evil foe. True unity is found in Jesus. Apart from Him is division. In the Church, that ancient adage “United we stand; divided we fall” also applies. The way Jesus frames it for the church is like this: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” The gates of Hell cannot overcome this true unity of the Church because the true unity of the Church is found in Jesus Christ alone. This morning we consider this true unity of the Church.

So far, our Lenten readings have said a lot about the Devil and the fallen angels, the demons. On the first Sunday of Lent we heard about the Devil tempting Jesus in the desert. Last week, the Canaanite woman asked that her daughter be relieved of demonic oppression. Today, we hear the account of our Lord casting out a demon that was mute. After the exorcism, the mute man could speak again and the people marveled. But some of the Pharisees grumbled among themselves, saying “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.” Jesus knew their thoughts and responded openly: “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?” United we stand; divided we fall.

There’s an absurdity to what the Pharisees are suggesting, a scoffing and a malice because they simply can’t stand Jesus. The enemies of our LORD often try to trap Him in situations like this, where it’s “damned if you do and damned if you don’t.” If God doesn’t immediately help someone in need, the scoffers say: “What kind of a God is that who can’t prevent evil?” And if God does act, as Jesus does here, they attribute wickedness to His actions. “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,” they say. But if demons are simply driving out demons, then there’s a spiritual civil war underway and there’s nothing quite like the destruction of a civil war. Brother fighting against brother leaves no real winner. Even victory in

a civil war carries with it a tremendous sense of defeat since it's one's own countrymen being defeated. Or in a family feud, one side might win and the other lose, but in the end, the loss for all involved is tremendous. If Satan is casting out Satan, then his kingdom would soon collapse. And his kingdom certainly will soon collapse, but not under its own weight. The Devil is smarter than that. The collapse of his kingdom will finally come only in the very work of Jesus as He drives out demons before Him.

Jesus adds another argument: "if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges." Jesus turns the tables on His enemies and takes the high ground. If they accuse Jesus of exercising the Devil by the power of the Devil, then they also must accuse their own exorcists of exercising the Devil by the power of the Devil. They've been defeated by their own game. "But," Jesus continues, "if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. In Matthew 12, the "finger of God" here is explicitly called the Holy Spirit. Jesus says: "if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." Is Jesus working by the power of God or the power of the Devil? That's the question the Pharisees are asking themselves. That's the question man must ultimately answer: Is this man Jesus of God or of the Evil one?

Obviously it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is casting out demons. He drives out the unclean spirits and makes room for the Holy Spirit. Jesus brings the Kingdom of God to earth and He takes the battlefield little by little. This is no easy task. The power of the Devil is vast. His influence covers the entire world and we ought not underestimate the control he has over people's lives. Jesus describes the Devil as a strong man, fully armed and guarding his own palace. Satan will do anything to hold his grip on those under his control. People are his prized possession and he seeks to drag many down into Hell with him. Before Baptism, we were all

under his influence. And so many in the world remain under his influence and they're generally at peace with that. Satan puts up a strong defense to protect what belongs to him.

Satan is strong, but Jesus is stronger. 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 the spoil. Satan is strong, but Jesus is the stronger one, who attacks the Devil and overcomes Him. On our own we are too weak to resist the Devil. His power is too great. But Jesus overcomes Satan at the cross. The strength of the Lord looks like weakness before the world. Yet in that moment, when our Lord gave up His life for us, the power of Satan was destroyed. The strong man was defeated by the stronger man. Jesus defeated the enemy at the cross and came away with the enemy's treasure. We are the spoils of this war and we now belong to Jesus Christ.

Next, Jesus says: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." Here, Jesus restates the truth He spoke earlier: "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls." United we stand; divided we fall. There are only two sides in the spiritual war being waged. There's light or darkness, continuing in sin or repenting of sin, Jesus Christ or the Devil. Jesus says: "whoever is not with me is against me." In this sense, there's no neutrality. You are either with Jesus or you are against Him. There's no middle ground. It's an all or nothing game.

Here we see the true unity of the Church. The true unity of the Church is found in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. If the Kingdom of God is divided, then like any kingdom it will not stand, or like a divided household it will fall. But the Church is the Body of Christ. It includes all those who are with Jesus, those who trust in Him, in His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. Those who are with Jesus come from all times and places throughout history

and until the end of the world. All those who fix their eyes on Jesus, trusting in Him and in His Word, remain part of this Kingdom. It's when our eyes begin to look elsewhere, to our own reason or feelings or to the opinions of the world that we become easy targets of the enemy. When the eyes of faith look to anywhere else besides God and His Word, we begin to divide ourselves from the Kingdom and stand in danger of a great fall. When people separate themselves from the congregation of saints and from their LORD, they become easy targets for the enemy to pick off. They end up scattering rather than gathering.

But together as the Body of Christ, the Devil can do us no harm. He already attacked our LORD at the cross and lost. Jesus, the stronger man, took the Devil's spoil and He gives it to us. Yet the Devil still prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Stand together and resist Him, firm in the faith. Know that Christians all over the world are facing the same things. Come together as the Body of Christ, because as the Body of Christ the Devil can do us no harm. The victory has already been won and our Good Shepherd continues fighting on our behalf. United we stand; divided we fall. United together in the Body of Christ, under the Word of God, we are citizens of a Kingdom that will never fall and members of a household that cannot be divided. 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.