

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Pentecost 3B - Proper 5B  
June 9, 2024  
Mark 3:20-35

### Binding the Strong Man, Plundering His House

“But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.” (Mark 3:27 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

Baptism is serious business. It's not something to be taken lightly. After all, when you were baptized, you became a child of God as your sins were washed away and God put His claim on you. At the same time, however, you also acquired a deadly enemy. As the water poured over you and you received God's Name, you gained a strong and powerful enemy who is bent on your destruction. And that enemy is the devil, Satan. He's the “old evil foe” who “now means deadly woe.” He is your arch-enemy who wants to destroy your faith, destroy you, and take you down to hell with him. And he is very strong.

This is no joking matter. We minimize his threat at our peril. But the Bible certainly does not. And Jesus does not dismiss the reality of Satan and the damage that he does to people. Jesus compares Satan to a “strong man” who has a bunch of goods stored in his house that he doesn't want to let go of. Satan is strong; he's hard to overcome. But the good news is that there is someone stronger, someone able to overcome the strong man. And His name is Jesus.

Again, we minimize the devil's threat at our own peril. But that does happen, especially in our culture. In our supposedly enlightened age, people tend to think of the devil as an antiquated old wives' tale with no basis in reality. Belief in the existence of Satan is seen as a silly, outmoded superstition, held by those of a gullible mind. The idea of the devil is used for comic effect. People laugh at anyone who believes that the demonic realm is real. But all that does is to play into one of Satan's best strategies: To dismiss his existence is to let down our guard.

In his book, “The Screwtape Letters,” author C. S. Lewis imaginatively relates a series of letters from a senior devil, Screwtape, to his nephew, a junior devil named Wormwood. Screwtape gives Wormwood advice on how best to deceive and lead astray the human that has been assigned to him as his “patient.” Uncle Screwtape writes to Wormwood and says: “I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that ‘devils’ are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion

of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that . . . he therefore cannot believe in you.”

But denying the devil’s existence does not agree with the biblical perspective. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, presents Satan as a very real being—a fallen angel, bent on evil. The Bible teaches that Satan’s power, while limited by God, poses a real danger to human beings. The devil is out to tempt, accuse, and deceive people. He is the enemy of our souls. He will assail us, attack us, and assault our minds and our bodies. Satan hates God, and therefore he hates God’s people.

To be sure, Martin Luther took the devil seriously. He took it seriously when a little child was baptized, knowing what was in store for that new Christian for the rest of his or her life. Luther writes: “Remember, therefore, that it is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from this little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy.”

Dear Christian, when you were baptized, you took on an enemy for life. The sign of the cross that was placed on you on your forehead and your heart was like a target being painted on you, and the devil is aiming for it. He wants to dispirit you and demoralize you. He wants to cause you to doubt and to pull you away from Christ your Savior. So you and I need to be deadly serious about the devil, because he is seriously deadly toward us.

Be certain of this: the existence and power of Satan, the enemy of our souls, is real. In the Bible, we find demons assailing and assaulting people in their souls and their bodies. Repeatedly in the four gospels, we see Jesus confronting and casting out demons. Those unclean spirits were doing real harm to people: attacking them in their minds, causing them to do self-harm to their bodies. Satan and his demons were out in full force during Jesus’ ministry. When Jesus saw this happening to the people who were being demonized, he had compassion on them. Jesus got angry with the devil, he cast out the demons, and he healed the people in both body and soul.

Indeed, there seems to be an increased occurrence of demonic activity—a spike of it, in very dramatic form—at the time of Jesus’ ministry. This makes sense, since the one who came to destroy the devil and his works was coming on the scene. Jesus obviously was able to discern when the various afflictions He encountered were due to demonic activity. You and I, however, are not able to know that for certain. It may be, also in our day, that various phenomena— self-mutilation, criminal insanity, drug-fueled bizarre behavior, for example – these spectacularly bad things could have a link to demonic activity. But we can’t be sure.

But he doesn’t always work in spectacular ways. There are a lot of normal-looking, normal-acting, respectable people who are equally in the thrall of Satan and under his sway.

Remember, the main thing that Satan cares about is keeping you away from Jesus and destroying your faith. And he can do that quite well in quieter ways.

How might this work? He can allure you with temptations, or he can crush you with disappointments. Either way, he wins. If you are drawn off into living for pleasure, living for self, so that you become satisfied with your life in this world, then you will no longer feel your need for God, and you will lose your faith in Christ. Satan wins. On the other hand, if you are so crushed with disappointment that you despair of God's goodness and lose all hope, you may likewise lose your faith in Christ. Satan wins again. When doubt assails you, when bitterness begins to take root in your heart, realize that the devil is trying to undermine your faith. Take that very seriously.

For you are not strong enough in yourself to overcome the devil's schemes. There's a reason Jesus calls Satan a "strong man." He is a formidable foe. Luther was right when he wrote: "Deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight; on earth is not his equal." "With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected." "But," the hymn goes on, "But for us fights the valiant one." "Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is." Yes, Jesus Christ is our divine champion, the one stronger than the strong man Satan. Satan is strong. Jesus is stronger. "He holds the field forever."

In our text, Jesus says, "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house." Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ came to bind the strong man, enter his house, and plunder his goods. And He did just that. We were captives of the devil, prisoners in his house of sin and death, unable to free ourselves. But Jesus came down from heaven, God's own Son in the flesh. He came to seek and to save us and to pull us out of Satan's grasp. When Jesus cast out demons, He showed His compassion for people and His authority over Satan. Jesus was binding the strong man, entering his house, and plundering his goods.

But the strange thing is, Jesus would demonstrate His superior strength by way of weakness. He allowed Himself to be bound and nailed to a cross. But this was God's plan to beat the devil at his own game. The devil would strike Jesus in the heel, but in so doing, Christ would deal a death blow to Satan's head. By taking on Himself the curse laid on sinners—death under God's judgment—Jesus would take away that card from the devil's hand. The devil can't play the sin card against us anymore. No more accusation, no condemnation. All our sins have been forgiven by the blood of Christ. The devil's taunts and threats go nowhere. The serpent has been defanged. When Jesus cried out, "It is finished," the devil's reign was ended. Then Christ descended into hell to proclaim His victory even there.

And so now our ascended, exalted Lord comes to us in our fears and says, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I

have the keys of Death and Hades.” Do you see? Jesus has bound the strong man, entered his house, and plundered his goods. Jesus holds the keys of Death and Hell. He has stripped Satan bare. No matter how much the devil tries, he cannot overpower us. Jesus wins. He holds the field forever.

In Baptism you acquired Satan as your worst enemy. But he is a defeated foe. He has been bound, and his house has been plundered. For you have Jesus fighting on your side. And with Jesus, you get all of His goods: forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation. Satan is strong. But Jesus is stronger. And it’s not even close. Glory be to Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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