

3rd Sunday after Trinity: June 20th, 2021
“The Lion Killer”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

St. Peter refers to Satan as a lion prowling around seeking someone to devour, and Psalm 17 decrees, “*He is like a lion eager to tear, as a young lion lurking in ambush.*”¹ Lions are great hunters. They are patient. They can inch ever so slowly, creeping up closer and closer on their prey. While their prey get comfortable with their surroundings, the lion remains low to the ground, virtually undetectable, controls its breathing, slinks through the tall grass, using the elements around him to conceal his presence and avoid exposure. When the timing is just right, he pounces at the unsuspecting, and now helpless animal, and using its mighty paws and powerful jaws it quickly makes a meal out of its prey.

This is the very picture the Holy Spirit gives to Satan. Satan is a great hunter. He is patient. He has the long game in view. He doesn’t stand out in the open and pace back-and-forth going, “I’m a lion. I’m dangerous. Stand back. I’m going to be a mighty king, so enemies beware. I’m going to be the main event like no king was before. I’m brushing up on looking down. I’m working on my roar.”

Rather, Satan hides himself in the reeds. He uses the elements around him to blend in, and he sure blends in today. Under the disguise of social media, T.V. shows, commercials, and movies for example, Satan lies in the grass and ever so subtly stalks his prey. Just look at some of the work that he has done. Since 1980 the LCMS gives a survey to the youth attending the National Youth Gathering and just listen to some of these trends. Now, keep in mind, this is in our church body, a Synod that is committed to teaching and confessing the veracity and clarity of the scriptures in all facets of life.

In a church body that values virginity up to one’s marriage, here are some rather sobering statistics. More than half, of LCMS youth believe that pre-marital sex is always wrong. Abstinence rates for 14 year olds is over 80%, and when you get to the 19 year olds, that number is down to close to 4 out of 10 being abstinent.

¹ Psalm 17:12

We know the issues of divorce in country. Are you also aware of the trend in marriage to focus on self-first, I must have everything in order about my life first, then I might try to look for a spouse. Partners first and life-long partners last is the new trend. Since 1960s marriage has been trending to occur at later and later ages. For people in their 20s, the rate has gone from 60% to 20%.

Instead of marriage being the building block and foundation of the family, the trend in America has shifted to have a child first, then maybe think about being a family. In the 1950s, 5 percent of children were born to unmarried mothers, today that number is over 40 %. In the issues of homosexuality, more than half of LCMS youth believe that homosexuality is a sin according to the Word of God. And as far as marriage is concerned, about 1 in four say marriage is for one man and one woman. The point here is that Satan has been lying in the weeds and in the area of marriage, and family; he has been waiting for his prey to become comfortable so that he can pounce, destroy and devour marriage: God's basic building block for family.

And it is not just the family he has worked hard to destroy. We have hosts of demonic, supernatural movies and T.V. shows that have most Americans thinking that ghosts and demons can be friendly and are nothing to be frightened about. They are simply like Casper the friendly ghost, right? They are human beings with unfinished business, right? Most Christians even buy into the lore, the traditions of the culture, and give no thought to what God's Word says about spirits. We confess that a person's soul goes to heaven or hell instantly upon death, and if I were to ask you that confirmation question, you would all get it right; yet, I know many would still believe that a ghost is my loved one trying to communicate with me and not a demon trying to give me comfort or fear beyond God's Word and the death of His Son for my sins.

We laugh at the idea of spirits in the movies and give no thought to just how much Satan is using those ridiculous examples in the movies to desensitize us to the reality. We become comfortable with the work of demons among us that we do not even recognize when we are being attacked. We watch the ghost stories, we strain our eyes and ears to see a blip of light from the Ghosthunters and Paranormal Activity, all the while, we miss the lion waiting in the weeds.

A few years ago, the world was saddened by the death of Cassius Clay, better known as Muhammad Ali. Of all the things he was known for, perhaps the greatest was his demeanor and expression of superiority. He would often shout out: “I am the greatest!” He gloried in bragging. He made no pretense to humility.

Cassius Clay reflected a cataclysmic cultural and religious shift that has been taking place in our country for quite some time. Talk about laying in the weeds to attack. Humility was pounced upon and tore to shreds when Adam and Eve first sought to be like God. It is constantly being devoured even today, and true humility is actually considered degrading in America. Self-affirmation, self-assertion, self-esteem, self is the cry of our generation. When the focus is on self, where does that leave everyone else?

The doctrine of self-esteem that has invaded the church from the popular culture is a false doctrine. You don’t learn to love your neighbor by loving yourself. You are to love your neighbor as yourself. Humility considers the needs, wants, and cares of the neighbor as important as your own, and all under the Word of God. Self-love is the way we sinners are wired. While the lion does devour, why does he have to if we are going to devour ourselves? He lets us get comfortable with our surroundings. Satan loves all of the self-talk, as we are so turned into ourselves, my life, my choice, this is how I identify; we do not see the lion in the weeds.

The God from whom, and to whom, and of whom, are all things, the God to whom will be glory and dominion forever and ever, teaches us that humility, far from debasing anyone, is the time and place of exaltation. While the lion is cunning and fierce, God has demonstrated His dominion over the lion and how He saves His people from the lion’s deadly entanglements. David professed before Saul, “***The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.***”² Of Samson the Lord says, “***The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat.***”³

² 1 Samuel 17:37

³ Judges 14:5b-6

Daniel was saved from the mouth of the lion. He professed, “***My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him.***”⁴

The true, righteous and holy Jesus Christ was pounced on by the great lion. Satan waited until just the right time, had Jesus arrested, tried and crucified. Jesus was not oblivious though. He knew the lion’s attack and He let it happen. Christ faced mockery, spitting, whipping, and the public humiliation of crucifixion without a word of complaint. The lion roared and bit and chewed at Jesus, and Jesus blessed those who persecuted him and prayed for those who spitefully mistreated him. Jesus humbled Himself under God’s mighty hand and at the proper time, Jesus was exalted. He was lifted on the cross, raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God. Christ was restored, confirmed, strengthened and established.

As the head, so is the body. We do well, and it is right and proper, to be humble under God’s mighty hand. He exalts us. We do not exalt ourselves. Pride always leads to a fall. Solomon, in his wisdom, wrote in Proverbs 11, “***When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.***”⁵

St. Paul, in listing the qualifications of a pastor in 1 Timothy 3, identifies pride as the sin that brought condemnation on the devil. The father of lies is the father of the great boast. Listen to what God, through the prophet Isaiah, says of Satan: “***How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.***”⁶

Pride takes many forms, conforming itself to the specific weaknesses of the individual. It is not always easy to identify pride for what it is, because the father of pride is the father of lies, and with his clever deceptions he disguises sin as virtue.

⁴ Daniel 6:22

⁵ Proverbs 11:2

⁶ Isaiah 14:12–15

Then the devil waits and strikes. He twists up our minds and cons us into judging God by our circumstances. He who tempted Eve with the snotty, sneering, assault on God's word asking, "Did God really say?" has not changed his strategy one bit in the past eight thousand years. Why should he? It works.

Following the example of Jesus and only through the strength of His mighty Word, we hear from Peter to cast all your care on the One who cares for you. But here the devil roars out his contradiction. He portrays your loving and gracious Father in heaven as a mean-spirited bully who is unwilling to forgive. Jesus, on the other hand, portrays the grace of God in sincerity and truth, as he tells stories about the joy in heaven over a single sinner here on earth who repents of his sin and believes the gospel. It is this faith, this simple and childlike faith in the forgiveness of sins that the devil attacks.

Faith looks at our suffering, our cares, our losses, and whatever in life makes us anxious and afraid and it casts those cares on God. Faith knows God is not punishing us when life is hard. Faith trusts that God looks at us through the obedience and suffering of His Son and sees us as His dear children, robed in the white robe of Christ's righteousness. This faith, precious to God, is hated by the devil.

He's likened to a roaring lion. Lions roar when they're hungry. The devil is hungry for our souls. He wants to kill our souls by destroying our faith. This is why St. Peter tells us to resist him, "steadfast in the faith." The faith is the body of Christian teaching – all of it. The faith isn't our pious feelings or religious sentiments. It is the totality of what God reveals to us in the Holy Scriptures. This revelation is centered in God's grace in Christ. It is as St. Paul says to St. Timothy, ***"The Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth."***⁷

While the Bible does liken Satan to a lion, it also teaches us the devil is bound. He is bound up in chains wherever the Christian takes refuge in the gospel of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake.

⁷ 2 Timothy 4:17

When we confess the gospel in the Creed, sing the gospel in the liturgy and hymns, eat and drink the gospel in the Lord's Supper, and pray the gospel in the Lord's Prayer – what do you think is happening to the devil? He is being bound up tightly in chains. Christ has given his keys to His Church on earth and when our sins are loosed the devil is bound. He can harm us none, one little Word can fell him.

Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, believed, and confessed, the devil is bound and gagged. Wherever the gospel is silenced, denied, and distorted, the devil is stalking his prey. Everything depends on the gospel.

So, be watchful. Be sober minded. Keep your head in the Scriptures and your hearts in the Word. Keep your wits about you. Or rather, God keeps your wits for you. You have been reborn in the font. The strength of the Lord is fed to you. The Sword of Spirit, that is the Word of God, is read and proclaimed to your ears from font, lectern, pulpit, and altar. Forgiveness, life, and salvation are yours. The lion is prowling around, but He is bound by God's Word. God has promised through His Son this reality in the resurrection, the Last Day, "***The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them...They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.***"⁸

As you wait for the final and glorious day of the Lord, hear again these words of Peter: Firm in your faith...And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁸ Isaiah 11:6–9