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Luke 11:14-28

March 7, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dark, diabolical, yes demonic forces are at work in the world. If you have eyes to see, the devil is the ghost writer of congressional bills and the opinion pages of major newspapers. What could be more opposed to the Creator than the attempt to overthrow His created order?

The plot to destroy the Creator's intent is going on at a cosmic level, but it also is happening within you. "In the heart of every person is a throne" (Norman Nagel). God made us to receive life from Him. In His dominion over us, He would give us the gladness and freedom we were meant to enjoy.

The devil is a liar. He tells us that God's good creative purpose is in fact evil. "You shall be as gods." So the devil tells us that we can only be happy by liberating ourselves from God and creation.

Presented as enlightened science, the devil points to the deep order and design in the universe and declares, "It's all a random accident. The world is without meaning, and you are without purpose."

He says, "Your body is a prison. Mutilate it, create for yourself a new identity." But of course, there is no creation there, only destruction. That is how you can identify the works of the devil: wherever there is murder, and a disruption of the created order, there you see the works of the devil.

Some things really are black and white. There is light or darkness, good or evil. When it comes to life and death, right and wrong, "There is no third possibility, no middle ground, no neutral. It is unrelenting war, Satan against God, and the battleground is the human heart" (Nagel). Satan's purpose is "to overthrow the works of God" (Nagel).

Today's Gospel presents us with Jesus as warrior, the stronger man who assaults the devil's stronghold. In the little parable Jesus tells, the devil is the strong man:

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils.

The spoils of war means the plunder, the treasures that are captured and taken from the defeated enemy. The Bible presents the devil as a tyrant, a vicious totalitarian who rules the world. He holds onto the humans that God created and delights in their corruption and destruction. But Jesus is the stronger one who exorcizes the devil. Jesus goes into the devil's stronghold and takes his treasure, his spoils. What are the spoils of war? You are, we are. Jesus does not come to oppress you, but liberate you, to free you for what you were meant to be.

How does the Lord Jesus accomplish this? Man by his rebellion sinned against God, embraced death, and incurred a penalty. You acknowledge this when you say in the confession of sins, "We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment."

But God steps into our place and as a man, accepts man's punishment. One of the great chapters of the Bible that describes this is Isaiah 53[:10-12]:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief ... My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out his soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

"He shall divide the spoil" – Isaiah describes the suffering of Jesus as a victorious battle. You are the spoils of war, your new life is God's aim. So Jesus doesn't *only* want to forgive you. He wants to liberate you. In His work of driving the devil away, Jesus says, **"The kingdom of God has come upon you."**

What does that mean? Our *Small Catechism* gives a very helpful summary of God's Kingdom:

God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.

Believe God's Word, lead godly lives. Today's reading from Ephesians spells out what that means for you: Imitate God, walk in love. That means some things have to go in your life.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater) has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

The baptized person who keeps on in these sins is like the man in today's Gospel who is freed from the power of the devil, his house is swept and put in order, but it is never adorned with the cross and guarded. **"And the last state of that man is worse than the first."**

The Gospel ends with Jesus seeming to say something dismissive about His mother. But that would be a misreading. A woman from the crowd praises the Virgin Mary: **"Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed you!"** But Jesus replies, **"More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"** Jesus is not dismissing His mother's virtue, but showing us what it truly is: Mary held onto the Word of God and treasured it in her heart. St. Augustine put it this way: "Mary was more blessed in accepting the faith of Christ than in conceiving the flesh of Christ."

So let's sum everything up: The devil is real, demons are real, and they want to destroy your life. Their primary tool is not terrifying cinematic effects, but by telling lies. The Lord Jesus is your liberator. His death is for

your forgiveness, His Spirit is for your new life. Live as a free person.
Believe God's Word. Lead a godly life. +INJ+