

INI

1 Peter 5,6-11

Trinity 3 — 21 June 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from Saint Peter's First Letter, which was read earlier:

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.⁹ But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: What with the end of school and summer vacations on the horizon, one of the newspapers had a column warning people to use some common sense when visiting either state of national parks either here or in Canada. The columnist interviewed park rangers who told of really, really stupid things that people did.

For example, one father wanted to get a cute picture of his children with some bear cubs, so he put honey on the hands of his children so the cubs would lick the honey off.

One fellow walked up to a 1,300 pound bison, turned his back to the animal, and then proceeded to take a selfie.

Another parent put his children next to two bear cubs and then got in between the cubs and their mother in order to take a picture.

None of these encounters with wild animals turned out well for the humans – some less well than others. Also, in all of these encounters the humans forgot that they were dealing with wild animals, and regardless of how tame they may have looked, there are times when their basic instincts kick in and the results can be unpleasant for humans.

In today's Epistle lesson, Saint Peter is telling us that we live in a world that has a wild animal that roams about. This animal is looking for one particular type of prey – and that prey is us. The animal is the devil – the Old Evil One, Satan. But we have been forewarned and therefore can be forearmed. This brings me to my sermon theme for today, "**Satan Wants Us Christians As His Hors-d'oeuvres.**" I'll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Give Your Cares To God;**
- 2) Satan Is On The Prowl;** and,
- 3) Our Suffering Is Not Unique**

1) Give Your Cares To God. Peter begins by advising Christians how to proceed through this world. Before God, one is to be humble; and if one is humble before God, then one is to be humble before others as well. We might well ask, "Of what does this humility consist?"

It means being humbled by God's mighty hand. This is the result of being laid low by sin and God's mighty hand is the Law which shows us our sin. Sin may be big or little, but the result of having been shown sin should always be the same – repentance and coming to God for the forgiveness which only He can give through His Son, Jesus.

As we come in confession, God picks us up, He exalts us; and He does this by forgiving us on account of what His Son has done for us.

Thus, our relationship with God is characterized by humility. It is the awareness that we stand before God not on what we have done for Him, but what He has done and is doing for us through Jesus, His Son.

This is why God invites us to cast our cares upon Him for He cares for us. It reflects the Psalmist when he says:

Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you;
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken. (Psalm 55,22)

What are our cares? Once again, they can be more than just sins, but they can be the worries that seem to afflict many people in many walks of life, and again, cares can be large or small.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cautioned His disciples against being eaten up with excessive worry about what they should eat or drink or wear. Even the unbelievers worry about such things. But Jesus goes on and exhorts those who are His to seek first the Kingdom of God and everything else will fall into place (Matthew 6,25ff).

In other words, God promises to provide for our physical and spiritual needs. He is faithful, isn't He? He provides both the bread we need for our bodies as well as the Bread of Heaven which we need for our souls.

Opposed to all this is pride. Pride is the opposite of humility. Luther put his finger on it when he said that pride sets itself up against God and thinks it can be either God's equal or even better than God. God would not endure pride in heaven or in Paradise. It was Lucifer who wanted to exalt himself above God and then it was He who got Eve

to doubt God's Word and even eat of the forbidden fruit – so she could be like God. Being proud didn't quite work out the way Lucifer thought nor the way Adam and Eve thought. Pride does not seek forgiveness.

So he who fell on account of pride, of his raging unbelief, now continues in this world, of which he is its prince. Thus Peter shows us that

2) Satan Is On The Prowl. Peter pictures Satan as a roaring lion; Satan is our adversary and he walks seeking whom he may devour – by the way, “whom he may devour” would be us.

But we are not left defenseless.

First of all, Satan is roaring. That is to say, Christians are given fair warning that Satan is there and we are his target. I've said it before, but when big cats are on the hunt, they are silent; if they roar, the prey is scared away.

Unfortunately, some prey is not scared away. You may ask, “How can that happen?” Well, just think of people who go into national parks and do not realize that wild animals, in spite of many indications to the contrary, are still wild animals. When we think of some of the examples, we may laugh and think that these people are in the running for the Darwin awards. But it is no laughing matter when gored by an irate Bison nor gobbled up by a hungry devil.

Peter then tells us that we can successfully resist the devil – and guess what? He'll even flee (James 4,7). In writing about this text from Peter, Luther has some good insight that we do well to heed. Luther says:

You must be sober and vigilant in order that the body may become

fit. But thereby the devil is not yet vanquished; more than the outward training of the body against sin is needed. The real sword is this, that you are strong and firm in the faith. If with your heart you take hold of the Word of God and cling to it in faith, the devil cannot win, but must flee. If you can say: “This my God hath said; on this I take my stand,” you will see that he [the devil] shrinks away, and with him will depart the sluggishness, the evil desires, anger, miserliness, melancholy, and doubt. But the devil is sly; he will not have you put your trust in the Word and reaches out to wrest it out of your hand; if he can make you lazy, so that your body becomes unfit and filled with knavish desires, he will soon wrest the sword out of your hand. He thus had his way with Eve; she had God’s Word, and if she had clung to it, she would not have fallen. But when the devil saw that she held the Word so loosely, he tore it out of her heart, so that she let go of it; and thus he had won (2 Corinthians 11,3; Genesis 3,4.13). Thus St. Peter has sufficiently instructed us how we are to fight the devil. Running to and fro will not do, nor any work that you might perform; what is needed is that you cling to the Word by faith. When he [the devil] comes and would drive you into despondency because of your sin, just take hold of the Word of God which promises forgiveness of sins and take that to heart, then he will soon have to leave off. (Luther, *Sämmlte Schriften* [St. Louis, CPH]: 9:1108)

Thus, one is to remain firm in the faith, continually clinging to God’s Word. Why? God’s Word tells us what sin is as opposed to what the devil would seek to have us do. God clearly said, “Don’t eat.” What did the devil say to Eve? “Did God really say...?”

You know, I don’t for a moment believe that the devil shouted those words as a lion might roar. I think the devil spoke those words as if honey was dripping from his mouth. But when we stand in God’s Word, the honey evaporates and the acrid smell of hell’s brimstone

assaults our face and ears when God says, “Don’t eat of it.” God’s protective Word changes the devil’s lying seductive whispers into roars which should warn us to turn away from his satanic cunning.

But Eve let go of the Word. And when she left go of the Word, she was indeed deceived.

Satan has not changed his tactics. Whether it is in society or in our personal lives, whether individually or collectively, he still would whisper, “Did God really say?” Those words may drip honey, but when set against God’s Word, they are the words that spell death for the soul.

In the midst of the taunts and temptations of the old Evil Foe, Peter reassures us that

3) Our Suffering Is Not Unique. The suffering that we as Christians endure as we resist the Devil is set against God’s care for us – and that care assures us that we are not alone in our suffering and that God’s care is more than sufficient to see us through.

Think of Peter himself – and perhaps he thought of his own suffering as he wrote these words. On the night when Jesus was betrayed, what did Peter do? He denied his Lord three times. And when he realized what he had done, he fled in tears. As he fled, He saw Jesus look at him, and then perhaps remembered Jesus words,

Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren. (Luke 22,31)

When Satan sifts, he tries to isolate – and make each person think he is alone and far from his neighbor and his God. But Jesus says that

regardless of the temptation, He is at that very moment making intercession for us, that our faith should not fail. That faith is God's gift to us and is nourished through His Word and His sacraments.

Perhaps we might think our temptations more severe than others. But God promises that He will never let us be tempted above that which we can bear.

Again in commenting on this text, Luther thought that perhaps the most severe sufferings which no human heart could comprehend, much less bear were borne by our first parents, Adam and Eve. Luther writes,

What sorrow must Adam have witnessed during the nine hundred years of his life in the experiences of his first son Cain, and [Cain's] children! No man has ever borne such a burden as lay on both parents for nearly a hundred years after Abel's death, until their third son was born. Truly, these nine hundred years were a period of sorrow and misery. (*Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker, vol, 8:91)

And Luther went on to comment that it must have been especially difficult for Adam and Eve since there were no examples before them of similar suffering with which to comfort themselves.

Thanks be to God that we have such examples. Moreover, we have the full counsel of God's Word as well as the revealed comfort of His Son, Jesus Christ. In Christ, God promises to limit our suffering to "a little while," and then continue His work of perfecting, confirming, strengthening, and establishing us – and this is done always in Christ.

Conclusion: C. S. Lewis once said that we can make two mistakes in regard to the devil – and the devil is happy with either erroneous point of view! We can either overestimate the devil or we can underestimate

him, perhaps dismissing him as some medieval superstition which has no place in our modern, scientific world. The world makes too little of the devil because the world makes too little of Christ.

To overestimate the devil is to live in needless fear. Why is that? Christ has defeated Satan for us.

But Christ calls us to stand fast in His Word. As we stand fast in that Word, we see the trickery and half-truths that the devil would whisper – but God’s Words puts in bold-face print. God warns us. We do not turn our back on the devil but remain firm in the Word and know that he will flee.

Temptations may indeed bring suffering, but Christ is by our side, interceding for us, and limiting the extent and duration of the suffering.

While the devil may roam the world seeking whom he may devour, we are to comfort ourselves that greater is He Who is in us than he who is in the world. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church of the East Bay & Central Valley
21290 Birch St.
Hayward, CA 94541-1538

SDG