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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
St. Michael and All Angels, Series C
Saturday, September 28th, 2019
Sunday, September 29th, 2019

Sermon: Silencing the Accuser

Text: Revelation 12:7-12

Focus: Jesus silenced and banished our accuser (Satan).

Function: That they would listen to the voice of the accuser no more!

Structure: Story-Framed

Locus: “God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature...” (SC, Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Dragons have always captured people’s imaginations. In Chinese culture they are symbols of good fortune. In ancient Babylon dragons were guardians depicted on the massive walls constructed by King Nebuchadnezzar. But in the West, dragons have always been wicked, greedy, reptilian creatures guarding hordes of ill-gotten treasure. Much of our best literature features dragons as major characters: Fafnir in the *Saga of Sigurd the Dragonslayer*, the dragon that kills Beowulf, and the *Earthsea Trilogy* by Ursula K. Le Guin. And, of course, who can forget Smaug from J.R.R. Tolkien’s book, *The Hobbit*: Smaug the Terrible, Smaug the Tremendous, Smaug the Chiefest and Greatest of Calamities, and Smaug the Unassessably Wealthy?! Admittedly, there are a very *few* friendly dragons in popular culture, such as *Pete’s Dragon* and the song “Puff the Magic Dragon” by Peter, Paul, and Mary. But proper dragons are large, scaly, winged fire-breathers wreaking havoc and destruction—like Trogdor the Burninator.

Yet in today's reading from Revelation 12, the apostle John presents us with the worst dragon of all, "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9, ESV).¹ Earlier in Revelation 12, this dragon tried to destroy the Christ Child:

"The dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child, he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne..." (Rev. 12-5).

And when this little, newborn king was caught up into heaven, the dragon decided to pursue the woman instead, who is a symbol of both Israel and the Church. She fled into the wilderness, just as the Holy Family escaped into Egypt to avoid the massacre of Bethlehem. But the Lord watches over and protects this lovely Lady (Rev. 7:13-17).

But Satan is not a dragon who spews fire. Rather, just the opposite! Revelation says that he tried to drown the woman with a river of *water* vomited from his mouth. The devil is a water-breathing dragon! Yet rather than the water and the Word of Baptism, this is the foul water of filthy lies and treachery. As Jesus says, Satan "is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Like most literary dragons, the devil is a trickster—a literal liar. "There is no truth in him."

In fact, the devil's title and name both reveal his character. Devil comes from *diabolos*, a Greek word that means "slanderer." And satan with a little "s" is a Hebrew word that means "accuser," such as a plaintiff or criminal prosecutor in court. (*Aside:* One of our members used to be a District Attorney for Douglas County, so we joked in Bible class that he used to be a "satan"!).

The devil slanders God and accuses us of our sins:

"Did God really say...?" (Gen. 3:1, NIV).

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

“You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be *like God*, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4-5).

The devil tries to make God look bad. He gets us to question God’s Word and suspect that the Lord is holding out on us and keeping us from the real goods. What God forbids for our protection becomes a potential source of pleasure on the flickering serpent’s tongue. The devil tries to make God look bad. Every temptation begins with a question of God’s Word or character.

Then when the trap is sprung, and we’re caught in the lie, the devil wastes no time turning from tempter into our prosecutor. As the Accuser, he used to stand before God, accusing us “day and night before our God” (Rev. 12:10). In Job 1-2, Satan tries to incite God against Job by claiming Job is only one of the fair-weather faithful and not a true believer. And in Zechariah 3, Satan stands at God’s right hand—the position of power and influence—to accuse Joshua the high priest of his many sins. Joshua is a stand-in for the entire nation of Israel, and Satan stands there—right in God’s presence!—pointing out the people’s iniquity, sin, and transgression.

But then Yahweh silences Satan: “The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?” (Zech. 3:2).

The Lord silences Satan and puts him to flight. How? Why? When? Revelation tells us: at the ascension of Jesus Christ. For when the dragon tried to devour the Child born to the woman clothed with the sun and crowned with the stars (Israel/Mary/the Church), “her child was caught up to God and to his throne” (Rev. 12:5). The devil tried to swallow up Jesus by the cross and grave, but Jesus rose again on the third day! And after he ascended into heaven, he took his place and sat down at the right hand of the Father: the position of power and influence. Jesus

took the devil's place! Where formerly Satan stood day and night accusing us of our sins, Christ now reigns in mercy and forgiveness (Heb. 1:3; 10:12).

“There was no longer any place for [the dragon and his angels] in heaven” (Rev. 12:8). So Michael and the angel armies of heaven did battle with the demon hordes and defeated them. “And the great dragon was thrown down...” (v. 9). The devil was banished to the earth. Because Jesus' blood covers our sin, the devil has nothing on us! He can't accuse us before God anymore. The people of God triumph over Satan “by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives—even unto death” (Rev. 12:11). When we love Jesus more than our very life, the dragon cannot keep us in his clutches or snatch us away from Christ. We belong to *Jesus* now, and no one can snatch us out of his hands (John 10:28-29). That is why the heavenly chorus declares, “Rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!” (Rev. 12:12a).

But the devil has not had his final day in court. The satanic serpent still slithers about, whispering lies into our ears. He may not be able to accuse us before God, but he can still accuse our conscience, shaming us into believing that God's grace cannot cover our sin. Guilt as a good thing; it drives us to repentance so we can receive forgiveness. But shame is when you're stuck in your guilt. “Just who do you think you are?” Satan sneers. “You are a poor, miserable sinner! You're a worm in the dust. What makes you think that God could ever love or forgive *you*?!”

Another of Satan's tactics is to persecute the Church, seeking to destroy our faith and life (vv. 13-17). He puts on the pressure with mockery, cruelty, arrest, imprisonment, and murder. The devil has a whole arsenal at his disposal.

But the devil *is* defeated (v. 8). And “he knows that his time is short!” (v. 12b).

I liken Satan to Hitler at the end of World War II. In April and May, 1945, as Allied troops invaded Germany from the West and Soviet troops were only blocks away from Hitler's HQ in Berlin, Hitler knew that his days were done. There was no hope for him. In the war room in his bunker, he moved around imaginary armies on the map that no longer existed. He issued orders to generals who had already surrendered. His own advisors were in secret negotiations with the Americans and British. His time was short, yet Hitler still gave specific orders for the execution of political prisoners (such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer), and he even commanded that the rate of extermination be increased at the concentration camps. Hitler's downfall was certain, but as the flames rose around him, he was determined to bring down as many with him as he could.

Satan's downfall is predetermined. He cannot win. Yes, he tries to work as much as woe as he can before the end. Yes, he is a dragon, but he is a chained dragon (Rev. 20:1-3). Foam and fume as much as he will, the devil cannot harm you. So do not listen to his lies. Do not allow Satan to accuse your conscience. Do not let the dragon bring you to despair of your life and salvation. There is no sin too great for God to forgive. There is no sin too small that Jesus did not pay for it with his blood on the cross. Dear Christian friends, you are baptized children of God, and your names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Luke 10:20). We are on the winning side! So "resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7). Michael banished the dragon from heaven. Now banish him from your head and heart!

When Christ returns, he will judge the dragon and punish him once and for all. He will let the dragon out from prison and cast him into the lake of fire, where Satan "will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). The devil is like a dead man walking. It's all over for him. As Christ declared on the cross: "It is finished" (John 19:30). All's well that ends well,

as they say. “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”²

Alleluia! Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.

² Julian of Norwich, as quoted by C.S. Lewis to Owen Barfield.