

## The 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

**Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup>Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup>If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup>If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup>However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. <sup>17</sup>For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup>And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Cc<sup>19</sup>So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good...<sup>6</sup>Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. <sup>7</sup>Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup>Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup>Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. <sup>10</sup>And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. <sup>11</sup>To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

### *We Have a Persistent Enemy*

In 1523 Martin Luther was alarmed at the way that children were being brought to the baptismal font. He was concerned at how carelessly and disrespectfully both the priests and the parents were taking this sacrament. So he wrote a little preface in a baptism booklet for parents in which he wrote, **“Remember, that it is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from the little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy.”**<sup>1</sup>

When we are baptized into Christ, we become enemies of the devil himself. He is not an enemy to be taken lightly. He is powerful, crafty, and today we will look at how persistent that he is.

I. Far too often we take the devil for granted.

In that baptism booklet, Luther laments that too often, parents don’t take the baptism of their children seriously. It is just something that they do. He writes further in that paragraph that I quoted earlier, **“I suspect that people turn out so badly after baptism because our concern for them has been so cold and careless.”** In baptism our children are reborn as children of God. The devil wants to snatch them back and devour them.

Peter compares him to a lion stalking his prey. The mother animals on the nature shows on television are always on the lookout for lions. They know that their young are easy prey, so they always keep an eye out to watch them. As Christians, we often don’t take that same spiritual care. We bring our children to have them baptized, but too often we neglect to watch out for them spiritually. We often don’t take the time that we should to teach them to pray, to teach them the Scriptures and to bring

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<sup>1</sup>LW, vol 53, page 102

them to church and Sunday School. We don't watch over what they are doing or whom they are hanging out with. We allow them to play video games, watch movies, and listen to music that can only harm them spiritually. The devil is like that roaring lion, ready to pounce on our children. Are we watchful? Are we preparing our children for the spiritual battles that lie ahead or do we fail to take this threat seriously?

We often fail to take him seriously in our own lives too. He is like that lion ready to pounce on us. In the wild, lions never go after the strong and the fast. They go after the young and the weak animals. The devil tries as hard as he can to weaken our faith. It is important to know that he has been defeated. We know that the final victory is ours in Jesus Christ, but in the meantime the devil tries as hard as he can to weaken our faith in Christ, that he can destroy us. In Revelation 12 it says that he has been hurled out of heaven, but then it goes on to say that he was hurled to the earth, and that he pursues the church. He is filled with fury because he knows that his time is short.

He is prowling around, looking for someone he can devour. He tries to weaken us, especially in two ways. The first is through **temptation**. Peter writes about temptation in the section just before our text. He writes about temptations to live in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and idolatry. When you think about such sins, the temptation to do them lowers our guard. We are just thinking of the moment, not realizing that the devil is using those temptations to weaken our faith, so that he can destroy us. We need to be watchful for temptation, especially those that we are prone to, that we recognize them and know to run away when they come.

The other way that the devil weakens us is through **trials and tribulation**. Peter writes about that in our text "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you, as though something strange were happening to you.*" (4:12) There are times when we are insulted for Christ's sake. There are times when the devil puts one trouble on us after the next. He makes our crosses as heavy as he can. He wants to make us as miserable as he can. He wants to fill our lives with loss and sickness, just as he did with Job. The worst thing that we can do is to try to make it through the trials and troubles of this life with our own strength. If we do, we will be wounded and become easy prey for the devil.

How then, can we be strong enough to withstand all the attacks of the devil?

II. We will be strong, when we stand firm in faith in Christ.

Peter writes about three things. The first is to **humble ourselves** under God's mighty hand, that He will lift us up. It is tempting to think that we can do it on our own. We want to stand up and fight against temptation. We can get through these hard times. But when we rely on our own strength, we are quickly wounded and eventually devoured. We are weak, but our Lord is strong. It is His strength that helps us through the times of temptation and tribulation. So as Christians we want to humble ourselves and trust in God's strength for us. The Bible often speaks about God's strong right hand. It speaks about how Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, ruling all things for the good of His people. The expression "God's mighty hand" comes from various places in the book of Deuteronomy. (9:26, 29; 26:8) In Dt. 26: 7,8 Moses says, "*We cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.*" God's hand was so mighty, that

He was able to deliver His people from the greatest power on earth at that time. All who humble themselves under God's mighty hand, find that in due time He lifts them from their suffering and troubles.

The second thing is to **cast all of our cares on our Lord** for the He cares for us. God is someone with a mighty hand, who cares for us. He cares for us so much that He gave His only Son to bear all of our sins on the cross. Our Lord invites us, "*Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" (Mt 11:28) The Bible shows that God has both a mighty hand and a very strong back. The Greek word for cast means to "throw on." It is only used in two places, here and in Luke 19:35 where the disciples cast their garments on the donkey that Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Just as the disciples threw their garments on the donkey, so we are to cast our anxieties on the Lord. How much can God bear? Does He want only our little cares, or maybe just the major ones? Peter writes, "*Cast all your anxiety on Him.*" Throw each and every sin, temptation, care, worry, and trouble that you have on the Lord. He wants them all. No care is too small or too great for Him to bear. We are strong in Christ when we don't bear our burdens, but we given them to the Lord who cares for us.

Finally, Peter tells us to be **sober-minded and alert**. Peter once underestimated the persistence of the devil, During the Last Supper Jesus told Peter that the devil had his sights on him. He also told Peter plainly that he would soon deny his Lord three times. Peter was sure that he would never deny Jesus. He told his Lord that he would die with Him rather than deny Him. But before the rooster crowed he denied his Lord three times with curses. The devil had sought his prey, and Peter had been caught, but then Peter held fast to his Lord. He trusted in Christ's forgiveness, and he was saved. Never again was the devil able to give him such fear and despair.

It's an ugly sight, when the devil finds prey, a Christian whose faith has become weak by the temptation, cares, and anxieties of this world. He causes them to despair even more, to become bitter even towards God, and if they don't regain strength by trusting in Christ, he destroys them. That is why like Peter in such times we need to be alert to all the tricks of the devil, and when he does have us in his grasp, that we look to Christ and His forgiveness to save us.

Peter knew from personal experience that we need take the devil and his persistence seriously. When we trust in Christ, we are the devil's enemy, and he will do everything in his power to destroy our faith in Christ and our lives. That is why it is so important that we take this threat seriously, that we are sober and alert. We have a persistent enemy, but he can be conquered, but not by our strength. We find our strength in our Lord by being alert, by humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand, and finally by casting all of our cares on our Lord who has saved us.

May God give us such faith, that alone is able to overcome all the tricks of our persistent enemy.  
Amen

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