

Sermon Lent 3 2021

March 4, 2021

Luke 11:14-28

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

In preparing the sermon for today, I did something I often do, which is to look at other sermons I've preached on a topic. Interestingly, the one from last year on Lent 3 was on March 15 of 2020. It was weekend right around when everything shut down from the pandemic. And on the one hand that can make us reminisce on all of our fond memories from the last year. But on the other, as I read something from that sermon about going to Costco and the paper product and water aisle being stocked only to about a third of its capacity, I found something else that I appreciated. I found that the message I preached from this then is just as true now, and that is to say that Jesus is the Stronger Man who can overcome Covid. In fact, not only that but Jesus has already overcome COVID in His life, death, and resurrection.

Even beyond that, as we read this passage of Scripture, we see that Jesus has not only overcome COVID, but He has overcome the devil himself. And as I say that, it might be hard to see where that comes from in the lesson. Sure, we know it from other passages. We see it from that life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—namely in the resurrection we see it. Buy, how do we see it here?

Well, look at the lesson and what we have there. You have Jesus casting out these demons, and He says that He's doing this by the finger of God proving that the Kingdom of God **"has come upon them."** Now, as a quick note, we hear that wording there, and to think of the Kingdom coming upon them can give us an image of conflict and maybe even a battle. And that certainly is true, but the meaning there is really just to say what Jesus says in His preaching: the Kingdom of God is at hand. And how is that Kingdom at hand? It's at hand in overcoming the demonic forces around them.

Now, that's not language we use a lot, is it? I mean in our culture, we don't think of things as being demonic a lot. No, language about demons is viewed as pretty superstitious. As we read *Afraid* last summer, I think we could see some of that reflected in the book and its discussion. And I think we maybe even reflect it in our own thoughts as well.

For example, I was talking to my friend that's a pastor in Seattle at my vicarage congregation this week. As we were talking, he was describing some of the circumstances you see with people there. If you're not aware of it, he was telling me

that Seattle has the third highest homeless population in the country. Now, if you know Seattle, you know it's a good size city, and as you combine it with the metropolitan area that is there including Tacoma, there are a lot of people, but it is not the third largest city. Sadly, there have been a number of policies that have contributed to that, though, including a very relaxed policy on drugs. This has resulted in this population being extremely prevalent. Now, to be sure as Christians, we should want to help those in need, and should help those in need, and that's a part of what we were talking about. But the other thing we talked about is how mental illness is so prevalent among the homeless. Mental illness often goes so far in pushing people to a place where they can no longer keep a job and with that their homes. It also often plays a strong role in those who become addicted to drugs. And that's what connection my friend made. He said, "Matt, you might think I'm weird for saying this, but there's a spiritual component to all of this. It's demonic." And isn't that interesting? We're so conditioned by our culture to think that demonic activity is a superstition that a fellow pastor was afraid I wouldn't agree that there was a demonic component to this. And I can relate to his concern that I would think he was weird. As a pastor, sometimes I experience that where I worry that I as I talk about demonic activity people might find that a bit too "unenlightened" and "superstitious." And yet that's what we see in Scripture. We see this demonic activity all around.

As my friend pointed out, and I think I even alluded to last week, when we see these sorts of things like what he's seeing in Seattle. Or we could even say as we see a worldview prevailing that is opposed to our worldview as Christians, there's a demonic component to it, an activity of the devil working through it.

But to come back to where I started, Jesus has won the victory over this. Look at what Jesus says in this lesson that tells us that He has won the victory. He says, "**When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.**" I remember hearing this when I was young and not getting it. I didn't get what it meant. I think I was afraid because this section has this whole issue with demon possession that it was saying that we were strong because of Jesus, but that if we didn't watch it, we could be overcome by Satan. But thankfully, that's not it at all. No, Jesus is making the point that devil is strong. In fact, as He talks about the Kingdom of God coming upon them, as He talks about Satan's kingdom being divided, He's making that point that the devil has a kingdom. He has rule and authority. In fact, as I often make the point, he has rule and authority in this fallen world through

sin and death. He is strong. He has his armament. He has his minions battling for him. And he thinks in this he's safe. But Jesus is the stronger man. Jesus is that One who takes away his armor. Jesus is the One who brings forgiveness of sin, who overcomes death in His resurrection, and now the rule, the authority, the tyranny of this devil is gone, and we are the spoils Christ carries away for Himself.

You are the spoils. As He has made you His own in baptism, He has carried you out of that kingdom of Satan, just like He rescued the Israelites from the tyranny of Pharaoh in Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea. As He feeds you His body and blood, He cares for you in the wilderness of this world until you can cross from this life into eternal life with Him. This is just like how He fed the Israelites in the desert until they crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land. He has won the victory. You need not fear, you need not worry. You need not doubt that the strong man cannot maintain his hold on you. No, the Stronger Man has come.

But look at how the world responds to Him. This was so interesting to me as I read the passages this week and studied them for the devotions. You know, one of the things I'm always looking for as I do that is the theme that stretches throughout. And as I thought about this theme being about Christ's victory over the devil—which you can't unsee in this—I couldn't get the connection to the Old Testament reading in Jeremiah. Here in the Gospel, you've got exorcism, and you've got the language of the Stronger Man. You've got the illustration of the house and the spirits that will fill it—an image of us being filled by Christ through the Holy Spirit and thereby not allowing the space for the spirits to come. Then you've got this blessing from the woman. Where did this story with Jeremiah come in? Where does this fit that Jeremiah is preaching repentance and hoping the people will hear it and repent, but then the people putting him on trial? Where does that fit with this lesson?

Then I realized it. The people treat Jeremiah how they treat Jesus. They want to put Jeremiah to death, it's clear they think he's blaspheming. Of course, ultimately we know they do that to Jesus. They put Him to death. But we see it here. **“He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.”** They're showing that mindset already. Here Jesus is helping them, He's releasing their people from the tyranny of demons, and they think He's doing it by the power of Satan.

Isn't that interesting? I think we can learn a lot from this in this time. You know, as I mentioned the prevailing worldview that's increasing around us. I said how it has demonic components. But look at how the worldview is approaching those who preach the faith. I think we could agree that the most central tenant of the faith is grace.

Obviously, most of all it's the grace of Christ to us. However, in that we ought to show grace to others. I was told a story this week of someone who was "cancelled," who was cast out from their job for suggesting that someone else who said something out of line with what's considered orthodoxy in our culture should be treated with grace and forgiveness. I don't remember what was said, if it was considered racist, or bigoted, or homophobic, or what, but some other person said that person who said it should be treated with grace, and the person who called for grace was fired.

We're now seeing people getting fired for asking people for grace for others. Not even a justification of something being said that was wrong. No. A request for grace. Not even grace in Christ, just grace. That's demonic, isn't it?

And I think as the Church we'll be seeing more and more of this. I don't know if you saw that the so-called Equality Act passed the House this week. If you're not familiar with that, it's a bill calling for equal treatment for those of every gender identity, which goes against Jesus' clear words that in the beginning God made them male and female. And while we certainly don't want harm to come to people who struggle with such things, we have to recognize the concern this will bring to us as Christians if this passes the Senate as we speak the truth of God's Word. However, we shouldn't expect anything less. I'm not telling you that if your conscience prods you to contact our senators you shouldn't. I'm not telling you that we have no human rights in dealing with things that will have backlash for us and we can't take action. We can and should where appropriate. I'm telling you though, that the world saw Jesus as Satan, and so they will see us as Satan too.

But the victory of Jesus still stands for you. You know that Satan is overcome. You know that Jesus is that Stronger Man. As the devil seems to be increasing in his work, know that he is always restrained by Christ. Know that Christ is able to rein the devil like a dog on a chain, because He is that Stronger Man. We might be belittled or persecuted or even martyred as the Church. But in the end, we belong to that Stronger Man.

Take comfort in that, Christians. As we come to one year of the pandemic, take comfort in Christ. As we look at the world and culture around us, take comfort in Christ. As we fear even the demonic around us, take comfort in Christ. Jesus is that Stronger Man. He has overcome the Strong Man and taken you as His spoils. Amen.