



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Seventh Sunday of Easter**

**May 28, 2017**

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**“Resist Him, Standing Firm in the Faith”**

*(1 Peter 5:8-9)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering” (1 Peter 5:8-9).*

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...  
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

**Collect:** O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

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To some of you, what I'm about to say is going to make me sound like I'm a religious freak, an extremist, a wild eyed street preacher who would be more at home with a bull horn at a busy intersection in Chicago than in the pulpit of a mainline denomination. I'm going to talk about Satan today, a real being whose aim is to destroy you.

Just saying that, some of you have already tuned me out. That's ok. This sermon isn't for you. This sermon is for those who take Scripture seriously. Unfortunately, many Christians do not. According to a recent Barna survey, only 34 percent of American Christians believe Satan is a real being. Most prefer to think he is a symbol of evil. Only 34 percent of Christians believe Satan is real. Clearly, he's been very successful at camouflaging his own existence.

One might assume Satan would want everyone to believe in him and tremble. Not so. Think about it. If he doesn't exist, then he's no threat. If he's no threat, then people are not alert and watchful, which makes them vulnerable. Moreover, if people don't take Satan seriously, how then can they take Jesus seriously? Remember, Jesus was constantly confronting Satan and his demons. How do we reconcile that if Satan isn't real? Either Jesus was just fighting shadows, or he wasn't quite right in the head, or he didn't know any better, or the biblical record isn't trustworthy. If I were Satan, I'd be tickled pink if people made any of those conclusions.

So you can see it's to Satan's great advantage to carry out his mischief underneath the radar. The devil will never come to you and say, "Heh, my name's Beelzebub, and I'm going to wreck your life today." He wants to wreck your life, for sure. As Jesus said, he comes to "steal, kill and destroy" (Jn. 10:10). But he's not going to blow his cover to

do so. Luther said he comes “masked and rouged . . . and presents himself as an angel” (What Luther Says, p. 395).

Often we attribute our sin and misery to our own weaknesses and fault, and there’s truth in all that, but don’t forget Ephesians 6: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but [also] against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil” (v. 12).

So how does our text suggest we defend ourselves against him? First, “Be self-controlled and alert.” Starting with that word “alert”, again, acknowledging his reality is the first and necessary step in defending ourselves. It makes me think of the birds at my feeder. They are on constant vigilance, because they know somewhere out there the neighbor’s cat is on the loose again and it probably has feathers hanging out of its mouth. Likewise, your enemy prowls around like a lion seeking one to devour. So the first thing: acknowledge that truth.

Second, Peter says be self-controlled. Self control means I’m not putting myself in situations where Satan can make easy prey of me. Self-control means I’m not going to hang out with the people I know will pull me away from God’s will for my life. Self control means you don’t go to a bar if you struggle with alcohol. It means don’t twitter, text, email or snapchat anything when you’re angry. You know your own triggers. Flee from them. That’s self-control.

Self-control also means I’m not going to go to places where I know I’ll always be reminded of my past failures. That is, it’s good to learn from your past failures, but it’s not good to dwell on them. When we dwell on past sin, then we begin to doubt whether God could really love us. Or we begin to doubt the genuineness of our faith. Either way Satan has us right where he wants us, on the cusp of unbelief and despair.

Who are you to tell God what he can and cannot forgive? Who are you to tell God who he can and cannot love? If God no longer holds that sin against you then what right do you have to hold it against yourself?

Be self controlled and alert. The third strategy to resisting the devil comes from verse 7: “Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” Of course, this means prayer. Remember God wants you to come to him with all your problems, your worries, your anxieties. He wants to hear from you, your thanksgiving, your thoughts, your questions. God gives you the gift of prayer, the opportunity to be in constant communication with him. The life of faith is not a detached intellectual pursuit. It’s a relationship, but what kind of relationship is it if there’s hardly any communication?

We probably all underutilize this gift of prayer. We think we can handle it ourselves, or we don’t want to trouble God with our puny cares. But remember God is trying to nurture a relationship with you. He listens to you. He hears your requests. He tunes into your problems. He wants to help and promises to do the so. So prayer should not just be a five minute thing in the morning and then a few seconds before the meal, but rather a give and take thing throughout the day.

Walking into what you anticipate to be a tough day at work: “Lord, give me strength for this day.” Your pre-teen rolls her eyes at you and makes you feel perfectly unreasonable. “Lord, help me deal with this and give me the right attitude while I do.” Strolling the farmer’s market you notice the first ripe strawberries next to the gorgeous display of peonies: “Thank you Lord.” Going for a quiet walk at dusk you intersect with that neighbor who is so verbose. It’s a wonder he doesn’t faint for lack of a breath! “Lord, give me patience.” Little prayers throughout the day; I think this is part of what Paul means when he writes, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5:16-18). He hears and answers.

There are additional benefits. Prayer helps you think about things from God’s perspective. It helps you see things as God sees them. Naturally then, prayer helps us respond more and more as God would have us respond. Prayer has a way of aligning your will to God’s.

Conversely, for a Christian to not use prayer makes him so much more vulnerable to Satan's attacks. So "cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

It's interesting, in the Gospels when Jesus comes face to face with raw evil, (for instance with a man possessed by a demon), first he deals with the problem. He silences and expels the demon. Very often the next thing Jesus will do is go away to a quiet place in order to pray. You see what he's doing? He's connecting again with the Father. He's connecting again with the good, the lovely, the beautiful. He's just confronted base satanic presence, the anti-God, the foul and disgusting, the pestiferous stench of the devil. And so he goes away to pray and connect again with the Father. Whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is praiseworthy, he thinks about such things (Phil. 4:8).

Think of all the crud you deal with at work, all the crud you watch on T.V. Connect again with your heavenly Father. Connect with Hiim who is good, wise, merciful, and praiseworthy.

Fourth, to help you resist the devil Peter points you to God's church. Verse 9: "Resist the devil standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers all around the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering." In essence Peter says, "You can do this, because you're not alone. You have brothers and sisters in the faith, who, right now, are going through the same things you are."

Sometimes it feels like you're the only one. But in your baptism, God inserted you into his church (the local parish but also the church universal) and surrounded with other believers in Christ. There's nothing you are going through that is unknown to others in the church. This is where Stephen Ministry can really help. "Misery enjoys company." Even more so, misery enjoys the presence and prayers and example and encouragement of your fellow believers.

There are others in this church who have gone through a divorce, others in this church raising their grandchildren, others whose children are addicted to heroine,

others who are facing a terrible disease. And there are others in this church who just got married, and others who just had a baby, who just bought their first house. Spiritual isolation is a killer of faith. God's proactive answer is the church. It is a place of refuge, a place of growth, of rest, to love and be loved, a place to give and serve, a place to be refilled, a place that sends you back out into the world, restored and forgiven. God's church is where his Word is preached and taught, where I hear my sins are forgiven, where I am reminded of my baptism, where I pray, where I receive the Sacrament of the Lord Supper.

Resist the devil standing firm in the faith because you know you are not alone. For God has called and gathered you into his church.

The final strategy in dealing with the devil is remember the promise. Verse 10, "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." Peter witnessed this personally. Remember how he denied the Lord, and how, afterwards, Jesus restored him and made him strong? Peter was a living example of God's forgiveness and restoration.

That's the only way you and I can make it through the darkness of this age. When all else is lost, we have forgiveness and restoration in Jesus, and the promise of his return. When you were baptized, you were baptized into Christ. That means no matter what is thrown at us, we remain in Christ. We're God's. So the trials and temptations are only temporary. The suffering is only temporary. "Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). Or as Paul wrote, "Our light and momentary troubles are preparing us for an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor. 4:17).

Even when Satan is pouring it on, inflicting all kinds of misery, in spite of that, we remain in Christ, and we know it's only temporary. As Christians we have the unique delight of going through the day, and going through life already knowing how the story ends. God will have the last

word and Satan's reign will be squashed. Satan will be brought down, and God's people will be raised. One day the victory proclamation will be heard by all in heaven and on earth and under the earth. One day all will bow at the name of Jesus.

Ultimately, we are not the ones doing battle with the devil. We're the turf that Satan wants to claim as his own. But God, in Baptism, has already claimed us as his own, and that is why we need not fear.

Remember, Satan is not the evil equal to God. Not at all. No his powers are very limited. Otherwise, he would have destroyed us long ago. Luther said we don't need to fear the snarling of a chained dog. "Let the prince of this world look sour, bare his teeth, make a great noise, threaten and act in an unmannerly way; he can do no more than a bad dog on a chain, which may bark, run here and there, and tear at the chain. But because it is tied and you avoid it, it cannot bite you" (What Luther Says, p. 402).

Most Christians in America no longer believe in the devil. I urge you to be treasonous to that trend! Acknowledge Satan's reality so you can be alert and watchful for his attacks. Be self-controlled. Pray continually, reconnecting with the good and the beautiful. Know that many of your brothers and sisters in Christ are going through the same thing, so seek their companionship and his grace in the church. And remember always, the victory is won, the suffering is temporary, but the glory eternal. Amen.

