



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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First Sunday in Advent

November 29, 2015

“From Satan’s Tyranny”

(Revelation 12:12)

Rev. David K. Groth

*“Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!
But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come
down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time
is short!” (Rev. 12:12).*

COLLECT: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

The Eagles of Death Metal, a heavy metal group from California, was playing at the Bataclan concert hall in Paris two weeks ago. This was one of the venues attacked by Islamic terrorists that evening. Moments before the attack, pictures and videos show many in the crowd had their hands up in the sign of the horns, the horned hand gesture, a common gesture at heavy metal concerts. Many use it as a sort satanic salute.

Videos also show the band had just launched into one of their more popular tunes when the shooting erupted. The song is called “Kiss the Devil”, the lyrics of which express love and devotion to the devil. Now my question is this: Is it just coincidence, or do you think there’s a chance the devil is mixed up in this whole thing? Could it be that Satan is in part responsible for convincing musicians, “Yeah, this would be cool song to write. Let’s invoke the devil’s name and tell him how much we love him and what he stands for.” Could it be that Satan is in part responsible for convincing young men and women that it’s cool to celebrate and support music that glorifies the devil while at the same time saluting the devil with such hand gestures? And could it be that Satan has a part in convincing Islamic extremists that it is somehow God-pleasing to storm a concert hall or a cafe and kill as many people as you possibly can before blowing yourself up? Is it just coincidence, or is there a chance the devil is mixed up in this?

“But surely, Pastor, you’re not proposing that the devil is actually real, are you?” Well, actually, I am. I take the devil seriously because Jesus took the devil seriously.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray “deliver us from evil.” Literally translated, however, Jesus prayed, “Deliver us from *the* evil.” In other words, this is not about a concept or a force or a dark spirit but actually about a person. “Deliver us

from the evil one.” That is, behind the temptations stands the one Scripture calls *the tempter* (Mt. 4:3). Behind the lies stands the one Jesus called *the Father of all lies* (Jn. 8:44). And somewhere behind all the dead and the dying stands the one whom Jesus called the “murderer from the beginning” (Jn. 8:44). Those who take Jesus seriously must take the devil seriously.

But we’re embarrassed by all this devil talk, aren’t we? It makes us feel like we’re still living in the dark ages. It’s the closet in the house that we would never want guests to open. So, rather than being specific and concrete about the person and work of the devil, we prefer to be vague and ambiguous and talk of evil as a dark force. We like to think we’re more sophisticated than those from former ages, more refined, more mature. Is it so sophisticated and refined and mature for an angry man to terrorize his wife or abuse his children? But is it so sophisticated, so noble, so brave and honorable to start shooting up a café full of people? How sophisticated can we really be when the Jerry Springer show is a money making machine, while classical concert halls struggle to pay the utility bills? How sophisticated are you and I when our private thoughts can be so vile and base? We’re not so sophisticated. We’re just sinners living in a high tech world.

But if you are a reader of world history, you can almost see an invisible hand passing an invisible cup of poison from one nation to another and throwing them into confusion and violence and chaos. That is, not all that ails us can be written off due to economic inequality, the marginalization of minorities, or poor parenting or bad genes or inferior education. History, national history, but also your history and mine, would show the devil is very real and has been very busy.

History has also taught us the most dangerous enemy is the one we don’t think exists. Think of it. In the garden, did Eve know she was talking to the evil one? Did she run in holy terror from him? Not at all! She actually had a rather relaxed conversation with him. And remember when Jesus

predicted his death? Peter took him aside and said, “Never Lord! This shall never happen to you!” Did the other disciples smell Satan’s stench or recognize his hissing voice? No, it was only Jesus who saw what was happening and said, “Get behind me Satan!”

You and I cannot recognize Satan. We don’t hear him coming by the sound of a heavy tail he’s dragging around. And he doesn’t emit a cloud of gas that sets off our carbon monoxide detectors. If there were a police report on him, under the heading “Special Characteristics” such as scars or tattoos, there would be written “None.” Rather, he is a master of disguise, and loves hiding behind various masks. Sometimes he uses deranged and deluded people as his tools, as he did in Paris. Sometimes he uses well-balanced people. Sometimes he uses poverty, but can just as easily use great wealth. Sometimes he uses discrimination, but if it suits him, he can use the sense of belonging too. But his aim is always the same. In John 10, Jesus said the devil has one goal: “to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.”

The Greek word for *devil* is *diabolos*, which shares a root with the verb *diaballein*, which means “to split.” The devil is a splitter, a divider, a wedge driver. He divided Adam and Eve from God and from the garden and from one another and from life, and has every intent of doing the same to us. In John 8, Jesus also called him the “father of lies . . . there is no truth in him” (v. 44). And he teaches we are no match for the devil’s might, or his cunning and craftiness. So part of Advent is praying the Lord to come and deliver us from the evil one. “O come, Thou Branch of Jesse’s tree, Free [us] from Satan’s tyranny.”

The text today from Revelation indicates his days are numbered and he’s full of wrath “because he knows his time is short.” This “short time” of his activity will last until Christ returns. It is the time of peril for God’s church. Satan hates all that God has created, but in particular, he hates the church, because we put our trust and our lives into the care of Christ and refuse to worship or serve him, Satan. Therefore Scripture promises that shortly before the return of

Christ there will be increasing turmoil for the church and the world. In Matthew 24 Jesus said, “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars . . . and there will be famines and earthquakes. . . Then, they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And the love of many will grow cold.” Then verse 22, “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”

Clearly, we are no match for the devil. It won’t due to count on our own strength, our own wisdom. Spiritual battles demand spiritual weapons. Put your trust in the Lord and in his Word and you will not be put to shame.

Both Paul and Peter point out that this enemy can be withstood only by faith. In Ephesians 6, Paul writes, “In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one” (v. 16). In the Large Catechism Martin Luther wrote, “If you could see how many knives, darts, and arrows are every moment aimed at you, you would be glad to come to the Sacrament as often as possible” (LC V 82). And Peter writes, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith” (1 Pet. 5:8).

Trust in the Lord. God will protect his people. Not even the gates of hell can vanquish his church. Remember how God took care of his people in the wilderness. Exodus 19 says, “I carried you on eagles’ wings, and I brought you to myself.” In his farewell address Moses reminded the people how God protected them like an eagle “hovering over its young” (Deut. 32:10). And the psalmist declares, “he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge” (Ps. 91:4). The devil can frighten us and make us suffer in the wilderness of this life, but God’s loving care will sustain us through to the Promised Land. Remember with just a few words how Jesus sent the devils reeling.

Therefore Paul reminds us, “Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ”, not even angels nor demons. We are more than conquerors through Christ (Rom. 8:37). By his death and resurrection, Jesus already won the battle against Satan.

Satan is not just the Evil One, the Father of all Lies, the Murderer. He’s also “the Loser” and might as well have a big fat L on his forehead. The strong man has been bound (Mk. 3:27). Luther taught the devil is like a chained dog. He snarls and snaps and tugs at the chain and makes a big fuss but because the Lord has bound him, his range and powers are limited. He is a loser, and suffered yet another humiliating defeat right here a couple of weeks ago.

We had a baptism, that of Kaylee Roberts. Kaylee is a third grader in our school. Two years ago, her mother died after a long battle with cancer. Kaylee’s father, though not a member, wanted her in a caring Christian school and chose Good Shepherd. Kaylee has been learning about baptism here, and decided she wanted to be baptized. We did it the week before last in the chapel service. The whole school was happy for her. Kaylee asked one of our teachers, Melissa Sterken, if she would serve as sponsor, which says a lot, doesn’t it?

As part of the baptismal liturgy I asked her, “Kaylee, do you renounce the devil?” With firm voice she answered, “Yes, I renounce him.” “Do you renounce all his works?” “Yes, I renounce them.” “Do you renounce all his ways?” “Yes, I renounce them.”

Those questions have been part of the baptismal liturgy for one thousand nine hundred years and it’s the exact opposite of doing this [horned hand gesture] while dancing to the song “Kiss the Devil.” In any event having disavowed the devil would leave a vacuum in anyone, so the very next question is, “Kaylee, do you believe in God the Father almighty?” And with equally strong voice from a little girl in third grade, “Yes, I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” “Do you believe in his Son

Jesus Christ . . .” “Yes, I believe . . .” “. . . in the Holy Spirit . . . ?” “Yes, I believe.” “Kaylee, do you desire to be baptized?” “Yes, I do!”

We dried her off and wrapped her up like a cocoon in a custom made white blanket that had the words embroidered onto it, “Kaylee Roberts, Child of God Forever” to remind her that those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). Then we lit a candle from the Christ candle and said, “Receive this burning light to show that you have received Christ who is the Light of the world. Live always in the light of Christ, and be ever watchful for His coming.” In Baptism the Spirit drives out the devil and makes himself at home in us. 1 John 4 says “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (v. 4).

So maybe it’s time all of us remember our baptisms. Maybe this is the age we start renouncing the devil again, and all his works and all his ways, renouncing some of the music we might otherwise listen to and some of the movies we might watch and some of the video games we might play and some of our fascination with violence and destruction and death.

But it’s also time to confess Christ to the world, for nothing more frustrates the devil than when people stand firm in the Word and in the confession of faith. And nothing more frightens the devil than the knowledge that his days are limited, his destruction is near, for Jesus is coming soon.

And so we pray, “Stir up your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance.” Amen.

