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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
4 February 2024

Sermon on 1 Peter 5:6-11

Worship Theme:

THE DEVIL'S WORK UNDONE

Satan and the other demons hate God. They demonstrate hatred by hurting those that God loves in any way they can. The epiphany Christ wants us to have is this: demons are real, they are plenteous, and they are dangerous. But Christ is continually undoing the devil's work. Through his Word, Christ Jesus gives us the power to resist the devil and stand firm in the faith.

Sermon Theme: **“Stand Firm Against the Lion”**

Grace, and mercy, and peace – all these have been freely given to you by God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN!

The emergency alerts go off every way they can – on your tv, your radio, your phone, your computer... “MASSIVE WILD LION ON THE LOOSE!” And instead of that alert being about a place far away where lions are naturally found, you're shocked to see that the location isn't somewhere overseas but rather is in your very own country and state. In fact, the highest and most serious alert is for your very own neighborhood.

What would you do? You and I both know that a 500 lb. lion is nothing to joke around with, and it's a confirmed wild and dangerous animal. So you make sure your family and pets are all inside, you lock your doors, you close the curtains, you do whatever you possibly can to make sure this lion can't get you. You're thankful for the warning, you take the threat seriously, and you respond by taking appropriate precautions to remain safely out of harm's way.

So if we would take such drastic measures to protect ourselves and our families from a wild animal that could cause physical harm and death, why is it that we care so little about the wild animal already among us who causes spiritual harm and death? Peter says, *“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*

If we break that verse down a bit and ask the good Lutheran question “what does this mean?”, then we better fasten our seatbelts – it's not a pretty picture. We often treat the devil as if he's nothing more than a cute little red man with horns and a pitchfork, running around causing a bit of mischief here and there. But that couldn't be further from the truth. Satan makes the murderous rampaging lions of the Roman Colosseum look like playful kittens. He's a serious danger and threat to our spiritual and eternal well-being.

In one verse, Peter explains the details regarding this lion. He's *our enemy* – this is not a friendly situation, no matter how hard the devil may try to make it seem otherwise. He meanders over to us, with a handful of delicious temptations, trying to make it seem as if he is the only one who truly has our best interests in

mind and as if God does nothing more than take all the fun out of our lives. Satan wants us to think he's our friend and that he just wants us to have a good time in life. But he isn't and he doesn't; he is clearly the old evil foe, *our enemy*.

He is *the devil* – there's no hiding about whom we're speaking! The devil is always in opposition to God. He will always try to steal the people of the Lord, tempting us to leave the safety of the sheep pen and follow the voice of a false shepherd. This is Satan, the father of lies, the one who rebelled against God in the earliest days of the world. He is the one who already stands condemned to eternity in hell and is determined to bring as many of God's special creatures with him as he can.

He *prowls around like a roaring lion* – this is not a weak or inactive foe. As we said a moment ago, we would take the confirmed threat of a wild lion in our neighborhood very seriously. This spiritual foe, this *roaring lion*, is a confirmed threat of the highest level. All the wild animals and all the terrorists and all the firepower in the world, all combined together and pointed directly at us, wouldn't come close to the threat we face every day from this foe, the devil. He is hard at work in this earthly kingdom, spreading his malice and striking blows against God and his Church however possible.

There's no mistaking the intent of this lion – he is *looking for someone to devour*. As I was pondering these words this week, I couldn't help but think of Shere Khan, the tiger from Disney's *Jungle Book*. He's an incredibly smooth talker, he moves about, having conversations with people here and there, and he somewhat tries to make it seem as if he's just another creature in the jungle. But all the while, he's the most feared of the jungle foes and is bent on one specific purpose – find the human and devour him. So it is with the devil too – this *roaring lion* may be a smooth talker and may seem as if he's just another one of the guys hanging out in life, but this foe has a one-track mind and all his will is bent on finding every person he can to spiritually devour them. And while he would be satisfied with anybody, we also know that the devil dearly loves to go after the Christians, those whom God has claimed to be his own, because there's nothing Satan wants more than to take down the Kingdom of God.

So what do we do? Peter has some thoughts on that as well. And thankfully, they have much more to do with what GOD does than with what WE do. "*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*" It can be easy for us to struggle with these verses. "*Humble yourselves.*" Nobody likes being humbled, because it makes us feel below someone. But in this case, we are! We ARE below God, and how wonderful that is! God is God – always has been, always will be. We are not God – never have been, never will be. And that's not bad news! That's great news because it means this battle isn't ours to fight alone; the Mighty Hand of God is on our side.

Yet even in those moments, we worry, don't we. Even though the hand of God is constantly fighting on our behalf against that roaring lion, we worry about it. On the one hand, we never want to treat the lion as if he has no power at all –

that wouldn't be true, and it could cause us to become complacent and lazy in our spiritual struggle against him, which in turn could have a terrible impact on our soul. On the other hand, the Lord our God is infinitely more powerful than the devil. King David offers this confident prayer in Psalm 25: *In you, LORD my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame.* [Ps. 25:1-3]

“*Cast all your anxiety on him*” seems like it shouldn't be all that difficult. But it often is. In our lives, we've learned that people let us down. We learn that people won't always be there as they promise, they won't always do what they say they will, and they won't always protect us when bad things happen. But that's when we get to remember that no matter how old or young we are, we are children of God, which means we can trust like a child. I saw a short video online the other day of a dad talking with his son. The dad asked his son if he was scared about falling during what they were about to do. The son confidently said, “No, I'm not scared.” Surprised, the dad asked why not. And the son said, “Because I know you'll catch me.”

That's the relationship we have with *the God of all grace: he cares for us*. The God who made us knows perfectly how to care for us. That may not always show up in the way we expect, and often our lives will be different than we thought or hoped. Whether we are blessed beyond our wildest dreams or struggling beyond our worst nightmares, *the God of all grace cares for us*. He knows what we face in far more detail than we can possibly fathom, therefore he knows what we need better than we ourselves can ever know.

We've said it twice now because Peter also says it: the Lord is *the God of all grace*. Any catechism student could probably tell you “grace” means “undeserved love.” Expanding that further fills us with awe as we see what this love led God to do for us. Certainly as people who are by nature completely dead in sin, we didn't deserve even a drop of love from him and could do nothing whatsoever to change that. But God's mercy and grace are bigger than our sins, and so he sent his Son. God the Father sent God the Son to take on the broken flesh of humanity and enter a world flooded with sin beyond measure to save that world. When Jesus' earthly life culminated in a broken and bloody death on a cross, the mission for which he came was accomplished. God was made into man in order to save all mankind. And Jesus did.

Because Jesus saved the world from sin by his life, death, and resurrection, now we have been *called to eternal glory in Christ*. Jesus succeeded in his mission on earth – every sin is forgiven. But those eternal blessings which are objectively won and accomplished in Christ can only be received through faith in him. So through the Means of Grace – “the Gospel in Word and Sacrament” – *the God of all grace calls us to his eternal glory in Christ* and freely gives us the very faith we need in order to be saved.

We don't pretend this solves every potential problem on earth for us. We still live in a world suffering the consequences of its rebellion against God, and the evil prince, that *roaring lion, still prowls around looking for someone to devour*.

But on the cross, Jesus defeated and condemned Satan the roaring lion for all eternity – the devil has already lost and Jesus has already won. Now through our suffering, God continues to bring us closer to him. He continues to remind us that even when we have nothing left to give and we have no power at all to change a situation or make it better, *the God of all grace* still has grace to give. And since the roaring lion is already defeated, his prowling will last only a little longer. Both in the meantime and also forever, *the God of all grace will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.*

What a full and perfect restoration is like, we won't know until we enter eternal glory with him – and how great that day will be! But until that day, no matter how many troubles persist for us and how powerful the attacks of the lion may be, Jesus is more than capable of carrying our anxieties, worries, and fears. So my dear friends in Jesus, **Stand Firm Against the Lion** – truly he is a powerful foe, one whom we must never underestimate or grow careless about; and yet we know we can always stand firm in the faith, for our God, infinitely more mighty and powerful, *the God of all grace, has called us to eternal glory in Christ, and he perfectly and lovingly cares for us, today, tomorrow, and forever. So to him be the power forever and ever. Amen!*

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.