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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
9 June 2024

Sermon on 1 John 3:8b and Today's Readings

Worship Theme:

THE DEVIL DOES HIS WORST, BUT JESUS ALWAYS WINS

Look at our lives—the problems, the pains—and it's easy to conclude that we are losing. Look at the world—the brokenness, the bedlam—and it's easy to believe that the devil is winning. It all can lead us to despair. But by faith in Christ we understand that things are definitely not what they seem. Yes, the devil and his allies are constantly doing their worst. Yet, ultimately, Jesus always wins. And his victory is our victory.

Sermon Theme: **“The Reason the Son of God Appeared”**

1. The Promise Made (Gen. 3:8-15)
2. The Promise in Action (Mark 3:20-35)
3. The Promise Fulfilled (Rev. 20:1-6)

Grace, and mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Is Jesus winning? I mean, really actually CLEARLY winning. Yes, I know the theme of our worship service today says he is. But when is the last time you really looked around you? If you've noticed a fraction of the things happening in our world and even in the Church, can you honestly say you're convinced that Jesus is winning?

- Record numbers of people are leaving, and membership is declining.
- There's a constantly growing disinterest from everyone outside the Church.
- It's harder to have religious conversations with anyone.
- It's harder to convince people they need Jesus in their life without them either getting offended or laughing like this is a joke.
- More and more people are elevating their own personal preferences and opinions over what God says in his Word.
- There are major shortages of full-time workers in the church like pastors, teachers, and staff ministers (it's definitely not just a WELS problem!!)
- Anytime the Church struggles financially and communicates that, people are ready to pounce on it with “aHA – I KNEW the Church was only interested in my money.”
- Many people view serving in the Church as “putting in my time”, resulting in an “I-do-this-because-I-have-to” attitude followed by an “I've-already-done-my-part,-so-now-I-don't-have-to-anymore” attitude.

Then we add to this the thoughts from our Scripture readings for today:

- The Church is plagued by sin.

- People are convinced Jesus was a crazy guy whom nobody should follow or believe in.
- The power of Satan seems greater than the power of God, and so much evidence seems to support that.

It's a lot to take in and a lot to worry about. Will our church and school survive? Will WELS survive? Will Lutheranism survive? Will Christianity survive? Can we as Christians in the world ever hope to do more than "just survive?!" And now we're going to look at all those things and somehow claim that Jesus is winning?!?

In response to all these problems plaguing the Christian Church on earth, the LORD God shows us the most beautiful promise, even graciously showing what this promise is like from start to finish!

1. The Church is plagued by sin, but **God made a promise.**

Are you willing to trust promises? We would probably say it depends on who is making the promise. If it's someone we know to be reliable, like a family member or a friend, then we might believe it. But if it's someone we've never met before or someone with a consistent track record of breaking their word, we likely won't believe them for a moment.

In the opening chapters of Genesis, we see a glimpse of the world God made and wanted for us – perfect, sinless, deathless, everything existing in complete harmony with everything else. But in almost no time at all, the devil and humanity ruined everything by introducing disobedience, rebellion, and sin into God's holy creation. From that moment on, sin was a defining characteristic of humanity. And I know I don't need to go into great depths to explain this, because we all know it's true. You and I have already lost count of how many times we've sinned TODAY, never mind in our lifetimes. If we were to list all the sins we've committed in the past week or month, I would need to sit down, and we would all need more comfortable seating, because we would be here a long time. And we don't have enough time left on earth to list all the sins of our entire lives.

What's the point? Look in the mirror – can you honestly say Jesus is winning? When you know the most secret thoughts of your mind, the most vile words you've spoken, and the most shameful and hurtful things you've done, is your life a shining example of a victorious Christ? Mine isn't either. Not by a long shot. In fact, it's the opposite. By nature, we're the poster-children for a victorious Satan, not a victorious Savior.

Adam and Eve immediately knew what that felt like too. They knew they had messed up in the biggest way possible and the entire future of humanity would suffer too. And if ever there were the slightest possibility of that reality changing, it would never come from us; it could only come from God. So the LORD God entered his beloved Creation again, calling out to his precious children, inviting them to confess what they had done and to return to his outstretched loving arms of mercy. While he did not immediately condemn them (though he certainly could have), God also clearly communicated that this sin would not be swept under the rug or forgotten – it would be dealt with in the proper way and at the proper time. So **God made the promise** – straight to the devil himself! – that a Savior would

come and he would come *to destroy the devil's work*. (1 John 3:8) Jesus will win!

Over the course of thousands of years of history, many people walked away from that promise of God. By the grace of God and the dedication of his faithful servants, some still clung to the long-ago promise God had made, that a Savior would come to free humanity from bondage to sin and death. In the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – we get to see this promise finally begin to play out. But sadly, by the time the Savior entered the world, the people who were supposed to be watching and waiting for him hardly recognized him at all.

2. People were convinced Jesus was a crazy guy whom nobody should follow or believe in, but God shows us **the promise in action**, every word and every deed of the Savior fully dedicated to keeping the promise he had made.

In Mark 3, we're told *Jesus entered a house, and a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. His family heard about this and went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."* Even the religious leaders and teachers of that day were against him, claiming that not only was Jesus not winning, but he was possessed by a demon and ON THE SAME SIDE as Satan!! Not exactly the way we expected God's promise to be kept.

If *the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work*, he didn't seem to be doing a very good job. It seemed as if the devil had done such a good job convincing people that the Messiah wasn't worth waiting for or was never coming, or that when and if he did come, he would be the kind of Messiah they had dreamed up in their heads (instead of the Messiah God had promised).

It's not all that different today. People are confused all the time on who Jesus is and what he came to do, if they even believe he existed at all. We often want a Jesus who is like a magic wand, doing whatever we wish at the exact instant we wish it. We want a Jesus who marches on the warpath, annihilating anyone who dares to stand against us with their false religions and ideologies. We want a Jesus who changes the entire world into what WE think it should be, regardless of what God says, somehow ignoring the fact that even among Christians, we don't agree on every detail of what that world should be like. To many, Jesus was just another man, a religious teacher, and maybe a good role model, albeit according to societal norms of a culture a long time ago in a land far away from this one.

But no matter what people said or thought back then and no matter what people say or think today, God clearly shows in his Word that when Jesus the Son of God was in the world, **the Promise was in action**. Everything God had said the Savior would do, Jesus was doing. Every problem God had promised Jesus would solve, he was solving. The devil was trying his very hardest to get Jesus off track or to make him fail in his mission – throwing the most difficult temptations at Jesus, trying to make his followers turn on him, or inflicting as much damage as possible on everyone around Jesus; but nothing the devil could do would stop Jesus. Satan just didn't have enough power! Nothing in Creation has more power than its Creator; therefore, as soon as **the Promise was made**, it was clear that someday **the Promise would be in Action**. All the power in the world could not and would not stop it. Jesus was winning!

3. Yet the power of Satan often seems greater than the power of God, and so much evidence supports that; but God gives us a glimpse of the end when Satan's power is diminished to nothing, all his work is destroyed, and **the Promise is fulfilled.**

The Book of Revelation is a fascinating book. It is often the book of the Bible people are most afraid to read and study because we perceive it as this dreadfully difficult book filled with crazy numbers and pictures that don't make sense! But if we boil it all down, Revelation is one of the grandest and simplest books in the entire Bible, and this is its beautiful main message: **JESUS WINS!** Revelation 20 shows us *the dragon, that ancient serpent, the devil*, and he is a fierce foe. He is determined to drag everybody he possibly can down into the abyss with him.

But the people of God do not need to fear that ancient serpent. He already lost! He was free to roam for a time, exercising some power in this world. But he never had ultimate power. And he was never going to win. Because **The Promise Made** in Genesis 3 is **The Promise in Action** in Mark 3 and is now revealed as **The Promise Fulfilled**. Therefore, we're told, *Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them.* (Rev. 20) Everyone who has received new life from God, being brought from the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith in the Son of God, is now free from sin and all its eternal consequences; they have received new life, and eternal death cannot touch them. All who are connected to Christ by faith share in his victory, because this truth is abundantly clear: Jesus has won!!

Dear friends, by the grace of God, this has all been given to us! WE are the ones who are connected to Christ by faith and who have this perfect new life, both now and for all eternity. The devil does his worst, but Jesus always wins. That's not just an arbitrary sentence we made up as a nice-sounding theme for worship today; this is an undeniable beautiful powerful truth!! *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.* And he has! We have seen **the promise made and the promise in action**, and God has even given us a glimpse of **the promise fulfilled**, a foretaste of heavenly glory, to keep us on the right path. For we are convinced that our Savior truly has saved us by dying and rising to forgive all our sins, and we rejoice that because of his mercy and love, eternal life is ours freely as a gift from him. From Genesis ch. 1 all the way to Revelation ch. 22, the message of Scripture is consistent and true, and it doesn't matter in the slightest what negative things we see in the mirror or in the world or even in the Church – **JESUS ALWAYS WINS!** For this powerful comforting truth, we thank you, Lord. 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.