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John 12:31-32

“The Ruler of this World is Cast Out”

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

Someone hurts you and you wonder if you can love that person again. An employee discovers fraud within the company and wonders if he should speak up. A husband dies and the spouse wonders if she can live. These things might not seem connected but they are. In each of these circumstances there is a battle between faith and doubt, hope and despair, Christ and the devil.

In our gospel reading for today we hear of this battle as Jesus says, "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." For those who know the church calendar, you know that the first Sunday of lent is always about the temptation of Jesus (one pastor even calls this day "Satan Sunday"). The problem for us is that we are in the gospel of John, and in John's gospel there is no temptation story. As Craig Koester explains:

Unlike the other Gospels, John's Gospel does not mention the temptation of Jesus nor does it mention any exorcisms among the miracles Jesus performed during his public ministry... The one "exorcism" in John's Gospel is the crucifixion itself, 'Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be exorcised' (Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 206).

Even though there is no temptation or exorcism, you do see the devil's handiwork in the gospel of John. Listen to John 8:42-47

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. **43**Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. **44**You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. **45**Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! **46**Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? **47**He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

The devil's tools are hatred, lies, and death. You can see his handiwork all around us. The world is filled with hate. There is hatred between political parties, classes, sexes, religions, and nations. Last week, during the Super Bowl, there was a group called the Hatetriots (Haters of the Patriots). The world is also filled with lies. There are big lies, little lies, and white lies. It is usually lies that cause the hatred in the

first place. And then there is death with its terrible sting – one we know all too well. Yes, the devil is active in this world.

No wonder the prayer of the day says: “Lord God, our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your Word and, when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.” We need God’s strength to battle the evil one.

There is a funny thing about this prayer. Not only do we pray for strength for the battle around us, but also for the one within us. Listen again to the prayer, “Lord God, our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises.” The problem is not just the devil rages among us, but also “within us.”

We, like the apostle Paul, who described this battle by saying, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. **16**And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. **17**As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. **18**I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. **19**For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. **20**Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it” (Romans 7:15-20).

This struggle usually occurs with those closest with us. We fight with our spouse. The Hebrew word for helpmate in Genesis 2 can also mean enemy. We fight with each other in church. Church should be the place of greatest love, truth, and life. But often it is not. Too often there is hatred among members. Too often there are lies that rip churches apart. Too often death occurs as we murder reputations as well as fail to come to our brothers’ and sisters’ defense. It makes us wonder if Jesus was talking to us when he said, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire” (John 8:44).

What is God to do with a devil who deals in hatred, lies, and death? What is God to do with us who drink freely of the devil’s elixir? God must confront and judge. In our passage from John 12:31-32 we hear God’s judgment, “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” Every word is important.

“Now is the time” refers to the time of Jesus’ death on the cross. Up until this point, Jesus had said his time had not come. But now, as he draws near to the cross, his time has arrived. “Judgment” refers to the Father’s judgment on this world and the prince of this world. “Driven out” literally means to cast out or exorcise. “Draw all men to me” refers to fishing nets that catch fish. In other words, God exorcises the Devil on the cross.

The irony is fantastic. On the cross, the ruler of the world tried to extend his dominion through the power of hatred, but God responded to the world’s hatred with love and gave his Son to be crucified as the consummate manifestation of his love (3:16). On the cross, the ruler of the world also relied on deceit to exert control, but God sent Jesus into the world to bear witness to the truth (8:40; 18:37). On the cross, the ruler of the world sought to conquer by inflicting death. He and his accomplices tried to bring Jesus into submission by killing him. But the spear that pierced him only revealed the life he embodied,

for the waters flowing from his side showed that life was victorious and that the crucified one was the source of the life-giving Spirit.

What does this mean for us? First, it means we are more than conquerors in Christ. It means we are called to love those who do not love us, and we are called to speak truth in the midst of lies, and to live even when we do not think we can.

It also means we need to pray because we do confront the devil. We should often pray the prayer of today: "Lord God, our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your Word and, when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever."

It means more. In this passage we see how God deals with us. To the devil, the cross was an exorcism. To us, the cross is a net meant to capture us. Listen again, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." Did you hear that? The cross is meant to draw all men (i.e. you and me) to God. The very weapon that judges the devil becomes the net that catches us. And so with love God seeks you. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (3:16). And with truth God promises a way to the father, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the father, except through me" (14:6). And it is life that God extends to you on the cross. "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live even if he dies (11:25)."

**In Jesus name,
Amen**