Proper 5B 2021 The Word of Christ binds the Strong Man, Satan

Genesis 3: 8 – 15 Mark 3: 20 - 35

Collect of the Day: Almighty and eternal God, Your Son Jesus triumphed over the prince of demons and freed us from bondage to sin. Help us to stand firm against every assault of Satan, and enable us always to do Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

If a thief came breaking into your house at night, what would you do? Whatever your course of action, your heart would be pounding out of your chest as you hear the unwanted noises of a stranger. With your thoughts racing like a whirlwind, you could dial 911 but it takes time for the police to arrive. The body reacts with the fight or flight mechanism. You could stay put to protect your family or run swiftly to safety.

The thief breaking in is the bad guy and the homeowner is good. What if the devil owns the house and Jesus is the one breaking in to take the valuables?

Now that poses a challenge to think of Jesus as a thief breaking in and breaking God’s 7th commandment: You shall not steal.

This is the unexpected picture Jesus paints in Mark 3 when he was accused of being a Prince of Demons and using that authority to cast out demons. The scribes from Jerusalem came to Galilee and were spreading these very lies about Jesus.

Jesus asks how Satan can cast out Satan. Divided kingdoms fall. Mutinies, civil wars, coups and insurrections testify throughout history that they do not promote prosperity or success. Jesus advises that a successful break-in of a strong man’s house requires that he be bound first before taking his goods.

For Jesus, running or fleeing from the robbery scene is not an option. By assuming the owner will defend his property and family, he needs to be disarmed and neutralized before the ransacking can begin.

We don’t have any problem thinking that it is Satan who has come into the Lord’s house to steal and cart off the plunder, that obviously does not belong to him. But it’s hard to wrap our heads around the other way: Jesus is taking something of Satan’s.

There is actually a long history of this found in the OT. Today’s reading of the Fall in Genesis 3 records the curse of the serpent for bringing sin into the world and lying to the woman. Therein God will put enmity between the snake and the woman, between Satan’s children and the woman’s children. In other words, God will break up the friendship of Eve and Satan by putting enmity, which means hostility, between them and their descendants.

Here God assumes that sin has already placed Satan and the woman on the same side. Is it true? When did Eve sign up to play for team Satan? Does that include everyone who came after her? Can you recall being drafted by captain Satan, warming up to him and making God your enemy?

It all sounds so strange, yet when Eve and her husband listened to Satan rather than obeying God, that is exactly what happened. They and everyone who comes from them died to God, were separated from God, and therefore declared God to be the enemy.

Sadly, in this deadly game lasting forever, there are no free agents or players switching sides because they have a better offer. But hearing St. Paul describe our lost condition as spiritually blind, dead and an enemy of God does not leave any room for us wanting it any other way.

By nature, we love playing Satan’s game of blaming others, making up rules on the fly in our favour, always looking like the good guy and secretly desiring to be god. We were dead in our trespasses and sins and were stuck as God’s enemies.

God broke up the team. He sent Jesus; a descendant of Eve and the son of Mary to strike the serpent’s head. Satan would indeed strike the heal of Jesus and work hard to bring about his death. Yet in that very death, Jesus binds up Satan, covers the sin of all humanity and gives total forgiveness for all sin.

The mortal combat between Jesus and Satan happened at the cross. Jesus did not use his strength but gave it up. Jesus did not protect his life but offered it up. Jesus died. This was an epic war fought without the usual weapons.

The result is that Satan is bound up, which means his mouth is shut. He is no longer free to accuse us. His lies can no longer be spoken in heaven where God has kicked him out for good and forever.

This is a war of words. Not just any words but words that speak of God’s free grace and favour for us in His Son who has taken all our hostility toward God and all that God has said. The Holy Absolution of loosing our sin and bringing us before God as holy is our Lord’s doing and his victory.

Even though Satan is bound up and gagged, he keeps on trying to discourage us to give up. He wants nothing more than get you to throw in the towel, walk away from Christ and give in to your old ways.

He will tempt you with the lack of proof deception. Where is the proof of your friendship with God when there is so much danger and calamity in your life? How can you be sure that you will receive a new body in the resurrection when no one has ever seen it? Why are there so many different interpretations of the bible and factions within Christendom when you are supposed to be on the same team? And on it goes.

But is Jesus divided? Does he not have a body risen from the grave? Are you not baptized into Christ?

St. Paul encourages us by these words: *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the thing that are seen but to the things that are unseen.”*

Because of the death of Christ Jesus, Satan is no welcomed guest in heaven. His lies and accusations have a short shelf life in terms of God’s eternal outlook. Heaven is where your citizenship resides and with your resurrected body, you and all your brother and sisters in Christ, will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.