

Midweek Lenten Vespers 2
St. Mark 9:17-29
February 28th, 2018
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Have Compassion on Us and Help Us

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

There is one recurring theme throughout the texts of Lent. First, we have our Lord + Jesus battling Satan in the desert. Last week we had our Lord + Jesus telling St. Peter that Satan wanted to “*sift him like wheat.*” Then we have a woman whose child is demon-possessed. Tonight, we have a demon the disciples cannot drive out. Sunday we’ll have our Lord + Jesus being accused of being in league with Satan. Next Wednesday we’ll have our Lord + Jesus telling the Jews that their father is the devil. The week of *Laetare*, the fourth Sunday in Lent, we have a couple of Gospels talking about the Lord’s Body and bread. Then in *Judica*, the fifth Sunday in Lent we have the answer from the Jews to our Lord + Jesus telling them that their father is the devil, by them calling our Lord a “*Samaritan and a demon.*” Then finally the last midweek text we hear before Holy Week is our Lord + Jesus telling us that He did not come to bring peace, but a sword, and that we must lose our life, before we can find it.

Did you notice the distinct theme in all of these texts? With the exception of the *Laetare* texts, all the readings throughout Lent up until Holy Week mention devils, demons, and Satan. There is a purpose in all this. The ancient Church knew what it was doing when it developed the historic lectionary. As I’ve said before, “I’m not big on themes.” And this is the reason, because the appointed texts for the season of Lent already have a theme hidden in them.

Lent is about the attack of Satan on you and I; the attack upon the Christian Church. This is a part of our preparation for Good Friday and Easter. To look around us, and realize how evil the devil is, and that he is attacking us from all sides by temptation, by selfishness, by unbelief and doubt, by fear and trembling. He attacks us with despair and guilt. The devil is relentless. He doesn’t let up, until we let up. He keeps attacking us with trial and temptation, until we give up and say, “the fight cannot be won.”

Of course, when we say that we are absolutely right, the fight cannot be won by our strength, or our doing. In the Gospel from St. Mark we have an example of this. The disciples were unable to drive out the mute spirit. Our Lord + Jesus had to do it. We cannot save ourselves or rescue ourselves from trial and temptation. The Lord Christ had to step in and deliver us from our sins, and temptations. He does this by His Holy Ghost. And the Holy Ghost does this through the means of grace. This is what our Lord + Jesus is referring to when He tells the disciples that “*this kind can only*

come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.” Through Preaching, and Absolution, and Holy Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, and the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren, the Holy Ghost drives out sin from within us. The means of grace are our form of fasting and prayer. When we neglect these things, or disdain them, or don’t believe that they can actually forgive sins, and grant salvation, and inherit for us eternal life, then we’ve rejected the Holy Ghost and there is no good thing living in us.

At this point we are in no better shape than the man who is possessed by a mute spirit. We are at the mercy of the devil. He is free to do with us as he pleases. And I guarantee you that he will. He’ll lead you into despair, or arrogance. He’ll make you think you are the most important person on the face of the Earth, or he’ll make you think you are the least important person on the face of the Earth; that you are nothing but a bug to be squashed. And after he has chewed on you a while, then he’ll leave you to suffer in your pain. After all he doesn’t need to attack you any more, he has already accomplished what he set out to do, and that is to destroy your faith in your Savior Christ + Jesus.

The father of the person with the mute spirit in this Gospel understood this all too well. He desired to believe. He trusted in the Lord + Jesus. He had faith that Christ would rescue his son. However, the devil had been working on this man to strip him of what faith he did have, and so he cries out, *“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.”*

This should be our cry at all times. *“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.”* So that we are clinging to what Christ has done for us at all times. This prayer is a prayer to Christ to keep us in the one true faith. It is a prayer to our Lord to drive back the assaults of the devil, the despair and arrogance, so that we are able to freely worship Christ as our Lord and Savior, the One Who forgives us of all our sin, without the despair and arrogance that the devil tempts us into over and over again.

To our cry for help, the Lord + Jesus gives us His holy Word. Just like this man who is possessed by a dumb and deaf spirit, He drives the demons of sin and death out of us. He forgives us by proclaiming our forgiveness through the means of grace, by Preaching we hear of Christ’s sacrifice for us on the tree of the holy Cross, in Absolution we hear of our forgiveness through the lips of the pastor, in Holy Baptism we hear that our sins are drowned and destroyed in the water connected to the Word, and that we have been raised and made a new creation, a holy and blameless child of God. And having been baptized and made righteous in its waters we also come to this Altar to receive Christ’s Body and Blood in bread and wine for our forgiveness. This is food for the soul. It is our spiritual food that creates and sustains our faith in Christ alone. It drives out despair and humbles us in our arrogance and pride. This is the meal that we share with one another in Christian fellowship. We share this meal and the Word of God with one another, drawing each other back into the reality of forgiveness.

Whenever we refuse to forgive one another or pretend that there is forgiveness and reconciliation when there is really not. Whenever we just sweep things under the carpet, hoping that the problem will disappear if we ignore it, then we have broken that fellowship, and we have allowed the devil free course and allowed him to rule in our midst. We have denied our Savior and His forgiveness and made ourselves out to be the rulers in His place. In short, we’ve kicked our Lord + Jesus out the door, for our own will and ways.

To that we must repent and return to our Lord with the words of repentance, and confession, *“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.”* Confess your sins and be absolved. Don’t hold grudges. Don’t slander people behind their backs to make yourself feel better. For in doing so you’ve allowed the devil to rule over you. In short, you’ve allowed the devil to possess you and control you.

When the Lord + Jesus speaks His Word to us by the Holy Ghost working through the means of grace, Satan will not let go so easily, he will refuse to let go. Just like he caused the man with the mute spirit to convulse and cry out and be left lying dead. And that is what we have become when we let the devil rule us and control us; we become dead—dead in trespasses and sins.

Our Lord + Jesus speaks to us even when we are dead. He ignores our deadness. He considers us alive and well. He does so, because of the wounds in His hands and feet and side. He considers us alive, and raises us up from death, because of His death on the tree of the holy Cross. In the same way that the Lord + Jesus lifted the man up and he arose, we too are lifted up by Christ through His Word and are raised out of sin and death to live with Christ forever, as His dear brothers. We are children of our heavenly Father, for Christ's sake. We have been granted a share in the Kingdom. Because of Christ's sacrifice, because He has claimed us as His own through death on the tree of the holy Cross, we no longer belong to Satan, but are children of the heavenly Father, free from the bondage of sin and death. This is how He has compassion on us and helps us. May He continue to do so throughout our lives. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria!