

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 15, 2024.

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 413:1-5, 237:4, 447, 421, 53:1-4.

Lessons: Genesis 3:1-15, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, John 8:30–47

Sermon Text: John 8:44.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We often speak of the enemies of the Christian as “the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh”. Lutherans often speak of these as “the unholy three” and in sermons you have often heard about “the unholy three”. In such sermons we often placed an emphasis on our own sinful flesh. When we examine ourselves, we recognize our sinful flesh, our old Adam, our old man. If we speak of “the world”, we don’t have any difficulty in recognizing wickedness and evil among people and institutions in the world as our enemies.

But we may not always recognize the devil, also called Satan, although we can often see his works and find his words. Sometimes we don’t recognize his influence or when we do recognize his influence, we ignore it.

Scripture plainly tells us in Ephesians ***“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*** (Ephesians 6:12, NIV84)

Today let’s look briefly at

THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD, THE PRINCE OF EVIL

1. **This is Satan, “a liar and the father of lies.”**
2. **We look at some of the ways in which he has influenced the world,**
3. **But God has given us weapons to fight and overcome him.**

Satan, the devil, is the head of those evil angels whom he led to rebel against God. The Word of God tells us that ***“God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment;”*** (2 Peter 2:4, NIV84) We also read ***“And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”*** (Jude 6, NIV84)

In our Gospel lesson you heard Jesus talking to two groups of people: Jews who believed in him and Jews who didn’t believe in him. You heard in our Gospel lesson: ***“Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”***” (John 8:30–32, NIV84)

Some didn’t understand what he was talking about and ***“They answered him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?’ Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.’”*** (John 8:33–38, NIV84)

To those who didn’t believe in him, he had some very strong words. As the omniscient Son of God, he knew their hearts, and could tell them: ***“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.”*** (John 8:44, NIV84)

Today we are looking briefly at Satan himself and his influences in the world, how he influences and leads the unbelieving world.

Satan has many and various ways he uses to try to overcome the child of God. He attacks us openly and subtly. He especially attacks us using things and strategies that may seem quite harmless. He attacks us with false doctrine and boldly shows us sinful lives of others as if they are perfectly normal and good. We don't know where he will make his next attack.

In Satan we are not fighting against a mere human enemy. The Word of God tells us plainly that ***“our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*** (Ephesians 6:12, NIV84)

Our daily fight is against forces of evil that are present in all the enemies of the Word of God and his Church. Satan is the head of all these enemies. And they are enemies, not friends as Satan likes to picture them. Satan leads all the evil spirits and demonic authorities. The prince of this world, the prince of darkness, is at their head. They are rulers of darkness, ruling through the darkness of sin.

In sin Satan has established his kingdom in this world and he has succeeded in leading men away from God, the Father of Light, into the kingdoms of darkness and sin. For that very reason, because the evil spirits as spirits cannot be attacked with physical weapons, they are stronger and more dangerous than any visible creatures.

We are not only fighting against people who are agents and allies of Satan. We are fighting against spiritual forces intent on destroying us forever in hell with them. And Satan is the head of them.

He led Eve and Adam into death. God had warned Adam in the perfect Garden into which he had put him at creation. ***“The Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”***” (Genesis 2:16–17, NIV84)

Satan wanted desperately to destroy man and lied to him. He lied to him directly and he didn't tell the whole truth, and that, too, is lying. He asked the woman ***“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”*** (Genesis 3:1, NIV84) When Eve answered him, he lied. First he lied bluntly saying ***“You will not surely die, the serpent said to the woman. ‘For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”*** (Genesis 3:4–5, NIV84) Then he mixed a bit of truth with his lie. He didn't tell the whole truth, and that is lying. Up until this time they had known only good. Satan offered them the ability to ***“be like God”*** and know both good and evil. And boy, did they ever come to know evil! Until this sin they had only known good, all the good that the gracious God had given them.

Of course, you know that Adam and Eve didn't just keel over and stop breathing. You know that they were spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. And that has been the situation for every human since then. Paul writes to Christians in Ephesus, to those who had come to faith in Jesus, ***“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”*** (Ephesians 2:1, NIV84)

Yes, Satan wanted to murder mankind and he did this by lying, by not telling the truth, by deceiving mankind. And Satan, the devil, continues to lie to and deceive mankind, always seeking his eternal damnation.

And when God asked the woman ***“what is this you have done?”*** ***The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’***” (Genesis 3:13, NV84) She recognized that she had been deceived and had sinned. Of course, just like every human, she didn't want to take responsibility for her actions, and tried to just blame Satan, who had taken the form of a serpent, a snake. We see here that Satan has the ability to take many different forms, just as he does in the world today.

Satan's lies and half-truths deceived her. And he is lying to this day, and he uses every unbeliever in the world to continue his deception, wanting all humans to join him – and them – in hell.

Should we be surprised at that?

How often haven't you personally been deceived? Oh, I'm not talking about a simple deception like buying a package in the grocery store and it isn't the size we expected, or it has ingredients we don't want and didn't expect in what we buy. We are not just talking about the lies and deceptions that the world, the people of the world tell in every area of life. We are talking about the lies and deceptions that lead us into sin. We are talking about being deceived and led into sin.

Realize that Satan is using every means he can to deceive you, to lie to you, to lead you away from Jesus Christ, to destroy your faith in Jesus Christ, and to lead you into eternal damnation.

Satan controls the people of the world. He controls unbelievers, and we know, often from very sad experience, how many unbelievers there are in the world. By their fruits we can see evidence of their lack of faith in Jesus Christ. Look at what you hear from the world and see in the world. Think of all the deceptions to lead you into sin that you can find in the world. How much “entertainment” presents all sorts of sins as perfectly normal, acceptable behavior? How much “wisdom” of the world leads away from God? Read First Corinthians chapter one if you doubt this!

Satan makes sin look good, and pleasing, and exciting and beneficial. He finds ways to deceive us into thinking it is perfectly OK to disregard, to disobey and to set aside God’s commandments. He makes us think that our own situation is different and that we really have the freedom to disobey God because we think that our circumstances are unique.

How about words like “well, this – and you can name any sinful activity you want – well, this isn’t so bad.” How about words like “everyone is doing it”, that is, sinning, to invite and encourage us to sin. How about words like “nobody will ever know that you are committing this particular sin.” How about words like “God doesn’t want you to have any fun.” How about words like “well, other people are doing things that are so much worse.”

Satan and his allies want to deceive us into following them – their ways, their attitudes, their actions. We must constantly be on our guard against sin, wherever we find it. It is so easy to want to justify ourselves and think that we are not doing anything wrong, or that we are pretty good people.

We can certainly be upset about lies that people tell us, whether they are friends, relatives, government, anyone. We may find lies that we think threaten our health, threaten our earthly lives, threaten our livelihoods. And behind every lie is Satan. Especially dangerous and damaging are lies that lead us into sin.

We must fight Satan at every turn, every day of our lives. When Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians, he speaks of the weapons we have available to us. He lists both defensive and offensive tools. These defend us as well as let us attack Satan, and the sinful world and our own sinful flesh.

The Apostle Paul writes ***“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.”*** (Ephesians 6:10–20, NIV84)

Yes, Satan is a powerful enemy. But God is stronger. Using God’s weapons we shall endure here on earth and rejoice forever in heaven. Lord, defend us every day from the devil, the father of lies. Never let us forget that Jesus conquered him for us, so that through faith in him we may live forever. Amen.