

1 Peter 5:6-11
7 Easter A • May 31, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho
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Resisting the Devil

The Word of the Lord from 1 Peter 5:8-9: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith...." This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear hearers in Christ, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Meanwhile, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour you. Devour. Lions often run down the weak, sickly and battered creatures who are just about dead anyway, but make no mistake: if a lion can get a plump, juicy, fatted sheep that's wandered away from its shepherd, that makes a great meal. Maybe a better one.

What I mean is this: the devil is especially out to devour you, baptized children of God. Unbelievers are already lost, so you're the ones in the cross-hairs. Against you, the devil's playbook is very thin because his options are so limited against those marked with Jesus' name. There's only one way that he can wrestle you away from the Lord, and that is to make you reject the Lord. No other sin is enough to condemn you, because you're forgiven for all of your sins. The devil has to lead you into unbelief.

Since that's the case, the prowling devil really only has three plays left.

One is suffering. Tribulations are one of the devil's favorite weapons. He uses them to keep the world persuaded that God isn't there, or God doesn't care, or God is helpless, or God is cruel. He'll whisper the same in your ear; so that rather than cast your cares upon the Lord, you'll turn to other gods – most likely your own wits – for deliverance. If you turn to other gods, you reject Jesus and the devil pounces.

Another satanic strategy is love for sin. The devil will constantly tempt you to love this or that sin, depending on your personal strengths and weaknesses. It might be pleasure, so that you want to make a god out of leisure, sex, video games, late mornings, happiness or whatever. It might be power, so that you feel blessed when you have money and influence, and cursed when you don't. It might be reputation, where you'd rather preserve your good name before man than do the right thing before God. It might be sloth, so that you really don't feel like you love doing anything, and you certainly don't see the need to be serious about God's Word. Every time you choose a sin, whatever it may be, you're saying that you're going to do things your way, not God's way; you're going to do things according to your word and will, not His. Each one of those is the devil's triumph as he draws you further from your Savior.

Look out, though, because the devil has a third play: pride in your good behavior. There are many who reject all sorts of vices of immorality and greed and sloth, upstanding citizens who live pretty good lives that benefit others. If that's the case for you, the devil may well tempt you to believe that God loves you because of the life you're living, not because of the death Christ died for you. When you believe this, you're trusting in your own behavior – not the Savior.

Those are pretty much the tactics that the devil has at his disposal. Before we move further, we make a couple notes. This explains a lot about the world, where popular trends in society deny the existence of God, accuse God of being negligent or cruel, or try to persuade you that all sorts of seductive sins are actually good for you. Given the state of our part of the world,

the devil has no need to try to scare people with weird, horror-movie kinds of stuff. He just lays low, mission accomplished, as the world heeds his whispers and rejects the Savior. If you wonder why the devil's called the "ruler of the world," now you know: the world is following his lead.

This also explains a lot about our preaching. We warn against sin, and sometimes list a few by name. But we don't spend a lot of time telling you to live better, more moral, more upright lives. Why? Most importantly, because we preach to preach about salvation. Remember that it is faith that saves and unbelief that condemns. Living a more moral life doesn't save you: a lot of unbelievers live admirably upstanding lives – but they're still lost if they don't believe in Jesus.

We do warn against all sorts of sins, though, since every sin damages faith and leads towards the one that condemns: unbelief. Indulge in them without repentance long enough, and you'll harden your heart and fall away – even while you convince yourself that you still believe in Jesus.

That's why the commands in our text are so important: "Be sober-minded." "Be watchful." And finally, "Resist him."

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Resist the devil. You're sober-minded and you're watchful because you've heard God's Word. The devil's temptations are often attractive: if they were repulsive, you'd find them easier to resist. But they're all bait to lure you in so that you can be condemned. Therefore, resist him.

But how? Be careful. You hear the command, "Resist him," and you think that it's your call, your move. So you say, "Today, I'm going to resist the devil. He's going to tempt me, but I'll be on the lookout. I'm going to identify the temptation when I see it coming, and this time I am not going to give in. I'll show the devil who's boss!" You're going to summon up your resolve and take your stand.

You don't have a chance. He's a lot better at this game than you are; and if you rely on your strength and resolve, you've lost. Here's what will happen: there's a good chance he'll tempt you into some sin before you even know it's happening – sins like anger, impatience, prejudice, lust and covetousness all work that way. Or else you'll identify a familiar temptation and hold out for a while – in which case he may tempt you to find consolation in another sin. Or he might use your resistance as a way to make you hurt until you decide it's not worth it. Or he may let you resist away, so that you start to take pride in the great job you're doing. Look at that: he's just pulled one of his three basic plays on you. You can't resist the devil. He's too much for you.

So if you can't resist the devil, how can you resist the devil?

Our text tells you how: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you." There you go.

You can't resist the devil. Jesus can. Jesus has: never forget those forty days in the wilderness after Jesus was baptized. He was tempted by Satan throughout the time, but He did not sin. This was for you: Jesus resisted the devil in the wilderness so He could credit you with His sinlessness and resistance. Furthermore, Jesus bore all of your sins to the cross and suffered God's judgment for them there: the devil has nothing to accuse you with, because Jesus has suffered for all of your guilt already. And having suffered and died for your sin, Jesus rose from

the grave on the third day. Therefore, even the greatest terror that the devil would whisper in your ear – death – has lost its sting, because Jesus will raise you, too.

Jesus has done more than resist the devil who prowls like a lion. He's conquered him, chained him and robbed him of his power. That cat has no claws, and your Savior gives that victory to you. While the devil seeks only to steal everything from you, Jesus comes to you in His Word and His Sacraments to restore you, confirm you, strengthen you and establish you. Do not forget these simple four words: "He cares for you." The God of heaven and earth – the victor over death and grave – cares for you.

So when St. Peter tells you to resist the devil, you do so by humbling yourself. By the grace of God, you humbly confess that you're sinful, that you fall prey to temptation and cannot resist the devil's whispers on your own. You humbly confess that you're helpless and need God's help: namely, you need forgiveness for your sins. You need the grace that Jesus won on the cross. You need the victory over sin, death and devil that Jesus has won for you.

We could put it another way: what is the last thing the devil wants you to do? Be forgiven. Therefore, what's the best way to resist the devil? Be forgiven. Daily, confess your sins and rejoice to wear the righteousness of Christ, who has defeated the devil for you.

Where the devil would mislead you in suffering, you say, "I suffer in this world because of sin – because of the devil's deception in Eden. But for Jesus' sake, eternal life awaits because I am forgiven."

Where the devil would seduce you with attractive sins to lead you to unbelief, you say, "Jesus has set me free *from* sin, not *to* sin. Although this temptation is hard to resist, I know it also seeks to rob me of faith and life. Lord, have mercy on me."

Where the devil would batter you with worry, you cast all your anxieties on your Lord. Should you be vexed by worry and sleepless at night, pray and tell the Lord your worries. Read psalms. Fill your mind with the Word of God, for He cares for you. This will strengthen your faith in trial. This also chases the evil one away.

Where the devil would tempt you with pride in yourself, you say, "I am made of sinful flesh and I cannot save myself. But Jesus became flesh like me to redeem me from sin. I will not take pride in me; gladly, I humble myself and put my trust in Jesus.

Or to put it another way: when you are vexed and tempted by the devil, show him who's boss. It's not you. It's Jesus. He's conquered the devil for you.

The devil prowls like a roaring lion, seeking to devour; and he would gladly lead you into unbelief and death for eternity. But while he is too much for you and me, he's now a cat on a leash, an enemy under Jesus' feet – the lion has been conquered by the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And if He's taken away your sin, then you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen