

THE STRONGER MAN

Mark 3:20-35

Second Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

June 6, 2021

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

THEME

Know yourself, that you are weak. Know your enemy, Satan, who deceives. Know your Savior, Jesus Christ, who has crushed the serpents head, bound the “strong man” and plundered you back.

INTROIT: PSALM 28:6-9 (ESV)

- ⁶ Blessed be the LORD!
For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.
- ⁷ The LORD is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts, and I am helped;
my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him.⁹
- ⁸ The LORD is the strength of his people;
he is the saving refuge of his anointed.
- ⁹ Oh, save your people and bless your heritage!
Be their shepherd and carry them forever.

HYMNS (*AMBASSADOR HYMNAL*)

#135: “Come, Thou Almighty King”

#294: “Built on the Rock the Church Doth Stand”

#141: “A Mighty Fortress”

COLLECT

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, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

Genesis 3:1-15 (ESV)

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”

² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and

ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 (ESV)

¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

^{5:1} For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Mark 3:20-35 (SBL)

²⁰ Καὶ ἔρχεται εἰς οἶκον· καὶ συνέρχεται πάλιν ὁ ὄχλος, ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαι αὐτοὺς μηδὲ ἄρτον φαγεῖν. ²¹ καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἐξῆλθον κρατῆσαι αὐτόν, ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη. ²² καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς οἱ ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων καταβάντες ἔλεγον ὅτι Βεελζεβούλ ἔχει καὶ ὅτι ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια. ²³ καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος αὐτοὺς ἐν παραβολαῖς ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· Πῶς δύναται Σατανᾶς Σατανᾶν ἐκβάλλειν; ²⁴ καὶ ἐὰν βασιλεία ἐφ’ ἑαυτὴν μερισθῆ, οὐ δύναται σταθῆναι ἢ βασιλεία ἐκείνη· ²⁵ καὶ ἐὰν οἰκία ἐφ’ ἑαυτὴν μερισθῆ, οὐ δυνήσεται ἢ οἰκία ἐκείνη σταθῆναι· ²⁶ καὶ εἰ ὁ Σατανᾶς ἀνέστη ἐφ’ ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐμερίσθη, οὐ δύναται στηναὶ ἀλλὰ τέλος ἔχει. ²⁷ ἀλλ’ οὐδεὶς δύναται εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ ἰσχυροῦ εἰσελθὼν τὰ σκεύη αὐτοῦ διαρπάσαι ἐὰν μὴ πρῶτον τὸν ἰσχυρὸν δῆσῃ, καὶ τότε τὴν οἰκίαν αὐτοῦ διαρπάσει.

²⁸ Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πάντα ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, τὰ ἀμαρτήματα καὶ αἱ βλασφημίαι ὅσα ἐὰν βλασφημήσωσιν· ²⁹ ὃς δ' ἂν βλασφημήσῃ εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, οὐκ ἔχει ἄφεσιν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ ἔνοχός ἐστιν αἰωνίου ἀμαρτήματος. ³⁰ ὅτι ἔλεγον· Πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ἔχει.

³¹ Καὶ ἔρχονται ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔξω στήκοντες ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς αὐτὸν καλοῦντες αὐτόν. ³² καὶ ἐκάθητο περὶ αὐτὸν ὄχλος, καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· Ἴδου ἡ μήτηρ σου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί σου ἔξω ζητοῦσίν σε. ³³ καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτοῖς λέγει· Τίς ἐστὶν ἡ μήτηρ μου ἢ οἱ ἀδελφοί μου; ³⁴ καὶ περιβλεψάμενος τοὺς περὶ αὐτὸν κύκλῳ καθημένους λέγει· Ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ μου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί μου. ³⁵ ὃς γὰρ ἂν ποιήσῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, οὗτος ἀδελφός μου καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν.

Mark 3:20-35 (ESV)

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” ²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

²⁸ “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— ³⁰ for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” ³³ And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

OUTLINE

Know yourself

Know your enemy

Know your Savior

MANUSCRIPT

The gospel lesson for the Second Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 3, verses 20 through 35. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 3, beginning at verse 20, we read in Jesus’ name.

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat.

²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” ²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom

THE STRONGER MAN (Mark 3:20-35)

is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

²⁸ "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" — ³⁰ for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." ³³ And he answered them, "**Who are my mother and my brothers?**" ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "**Here are my mother and my brothers!** ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have three goals this morning. I'm going to tell you what they are, so that you, as the listener, can help me accomplish them. First, I want us to know ourselves. Second, I want us to know our enemy. Third, I want us to know our Savior. That's three goals. We should know ourselves. That is, we should understand human nature. We should know our enemy, that is, the devil. And we should know our Savior, Jesus Christ.

First, we should know ourselves. The ancient Greek philosophers had a saying: "Know yourself." They were talking about self-awareness. You have to know what you are capable of and what you are not capable of. It also means knowing your place in life. We are all under certain authorities. Knowing our place in life informs us of whom we should be obedient to and when we should keep our mouths shut. Most importantly, we should know ourselves in a moral sense. There are few things in life more annoying than a person who does not recognize his own vices. A lazy person who thinks he deserves a handout. An ignorant person who thinks he knows it all. A rude person who thinks he's entitled to treat others with disrespect. Such people do not know themselves. When we know ourselves, then we know what sins need to be repented of. So the Greek philosophers taught the value of knowing yourself.

And this is right. We should know ourselves. But the difference between Christianity and the Greeks is that the Greek philosophers taught that this was achieved through self-introspection. That is, you meditate on your thoughts, desires, words, and actions. Through this introspection, you would get to know yourself. The Christian approach is different. The Christian approach still involves self-examination, but we examine ourselves against the standard of God's Law. In his *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther says, "Examine yourself in the light of the Ten Commandments, whether as father or mother, son or daughter, master or servant, you have been disobedient, unfaithful, slothful, ill-tempered, unchaste, or quarrelsome, or whether you have injured anyone by word or deed, stolen, neglected or wasted anything, or done any other evil" ("Confession"). We really need something outside of ourselves to tell us who we are. The failure of the Greek

idea was that they assumed that man is wise enough and honest enough to evaluate himself rightly. This is, ironically, a case of not knowing ourselves. Part of the fallen human nature is our desire to justify ourselves. And we usually do this without recognizing it. We can't bear to think honestly about ourselves. Most of us, I think, have just a few moments in our lives where we catch an honest glimpse into our own character. These are the moments where your soul feels naked before God. I think these are only partial glimpses, and we only get a few of them in life. To constantly live with full knowledge of ourselves would be perpetually devastating. It would paralyze us. So we naturally desire to justify ourselves. But we need to know ourselves rightly, so we examine ourselves against God's commandments.

It is also helpful to understand how we got this way. Genesis 3, which records the fall into sin, gives us a really insightful look into human nature. It also introduces us to our enemy, the devil, but first we'll look at the nature of the first sin. What did Adam and Eve do wrong? They ate from the tree God commanded them not to eat from. But what was wrong with that, besides the simple fact that God told them not to do it? We know that eating from the tree was bad, but why? The temptation was to be like God. The serpent said, "When you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Then, when Eve saw that the fruit looked good, "and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6). They wanted to become like God. That was the nature of their sin. Before the fall, while they abstained from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they allowed that knowledge to belong to God. And in this way they worshipped God. For however long it was before they gave into temptation, they worshipped God by submitting to his wisdom. But they sinned when they wanted that wisdom to be their own. Instead of *having* a God, they wanted to *be* gods.

And this gives us a glimpse into the nature of sin. All sin follows the nature of the first sin. Sin is idolatry of self. Instead of having a God whom we obey and submit to and receive from, we want to be our own gods. Everybody wants to rule the world. We all have this inborn inclination to be in charge of everything we can possibly get our hands on. In our more honest moments, we might realize that we don't really have the wisdom to rule the world, or we might see the stress and criticism world leaders face, so we suppress that desire. But everybody dreams, at some point in life, of ruling the world. I do. I dream of what I would do if I were President of the United States. I think about what my platform will be when I run. By the way, on my first term, I'm going to win 64% of the vote, and on my second term I'm going to win 72%. Why does this even cross my mind? Because everybody wants to rule the world. That is, we all want to be god. That is the fundamental nature of our sin. We want to be in charge. We want to set our own rules. And not only do we want to set our own rules, we want to set the rules for other people. We want to be the source of knowledge. We want to be the heroes and the winners. We want to gratify our own desires, and we want to justify it as the right thing. Every sin is the worship of ourselves. The source of it is that first sin, where Adam and Eve gave into the temptation to become like God.

This idolatry of self is sin. But there is an added danger. It makes us more susceptible to the attacks of our enemy. It makes us think that we can stand against the devil by our own strength, or even fight against him. Our first parents could not stand against the devil, and they weren't even sinners yet. So we have to know ourselves. We have to know that our idolatry of self is a weakness. It makes us overestimate our own spiritual power. We have to know that we probably don't know ourselves as well as we need to.

THE STRONGER MAN (Mark 3:20-35)

We also have to know our enemy. The ancient Chinese general Sun Tzu said in his famous book *The Art of War*, “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.” That is, if you have full knowledge of yourself and full knowledge of your enemy, you will never lose. You will know how to defeat your enemy. And if you can’t defeat your enemy, you will know that too, in which case you avoid the battle. However, sometimes you can’t avoid the battle. The enemy brings the battle to you in a way you cannot avoid. Such are the attacks of the devil. He is an enemy that we cannot defeat. He is also an enemy that we cannot avoid.

The devil is smarter than us. He has been attacking God’s creation and tempting man since the very beginning. He knows what he’s doing, and he’s very good at it. You and I are simply not smart enough and not strong enough to stand against him. In Jesus’ parable here, he calls the devil **“the strong man”** (3:27).

The devil’s strength is his ability to deceive. Elsewhere Jesus calls him **“the father of lies”** (John 8:44). Every lie has its origin in the devil. And, of course, the most effective lies are the ones that go undetected. This is the devil’s great skill. He deceives. And they’re not trivial kinds of lies. He’s not really interested in just mixing up facts in your brain to make you lose at Trivial Pursuit. What he really wants to do is make good look evil and evil look good. That’s what he did to Adam and Eve in the garden. He implied that God was evil for withholding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil from them, and he made eating from the tree look like a good thing. He didn’t say, “You should be evil, because evil is fun.” That might work with some people, but with people who want to feel good about themselves, the devil presents evil as good and good as evil.

He is still doing this today. There are many examples. The killing of unborn children is presented as a good thing. Overthrowing police departments is presented as a good thing. All kinds of sinful sexual relationships and behaviors are presented as good things. There are too many to even name. We are taught to pursue our own desires, and it is presented as virtuous to do so. People leave their spouses because they think they’re not in love anymore, and the right thing to do is find someone else that they truly love. Children are taught to disregard the wisdom of their parents so that they can “find their own truth.” People do not pursue these things because they think they are evil. They pursue them because they think they are good. The most disturbing serial killers are the ones who think they are doing a good thing. Terrorists crash airplanes and blow up buildings because they think it’s the right thing to do. When tyrants commit genocide, they do it for “the greater good.” Whether it’s Hitler or Stalin or chairman Mao, the most disturbing thing is that they all thought they were doing the right thing. And we’re naïve enough to accept a moral philosophy that says, “You have to do what you believe is right.” We don’t know ourselves, and we don’t know our enemy. The great lie of the devil is to take the things God has created, instituted, and commanded, and make them look evil. Therefore, rebelling against these things looks good. The devil does not say, “Do evil, because evil is fun.” He makes good look evil and evil look good. This way, he can deceive us into evil without us ever knowing that we have been deceived.

How then can we discern the truth of what is good and what is evil? Only by God’s Word. The only way to know is to listen to the one who cannot be corrupted.

Know yourself. We are weak. Know your enemy. The devil is deceptive. He is stronger and smarter than we are. And, most importantly, know your Savior. If we truly know ourselves, and

THE STRONGER MAN (Mark 3:20-35)

if we truly know the devil, we will know that we cannot stand against him and survive. This is the kind of battle where you bravely run away. Or ... look to your Savior.

In Genesis 3:15, after Adam and Eve fell into sin, God says to the serpent,

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

God promises enmity, or hostility, between the devil and the seed of the woman. The seed of the woman is the one who would eventually be born without the help of a man. That is, Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Virgin Mary. God promises hostility between the devil and Jesus. This is actually good news for us. God is saying to the serpent, “This isn’t over.” The serpent would strike Jesus’ heel, and Jesus would crush his head. This is a symbolic picture of the cross. Where do snakes attack? Not at your head. They can’t reach that high, and they don’t need to. They bite the heel and kill you with poison. A serpent striking a person’s heel appears to be a mortal blow. But it’s not with Jesus. It only looks that way for a few days until he rises from the dead. It turns out that what really happens at the cross is that Jesus crushes the serpent’s head.

Besides being a deceiver, Satan is also our accuser. That’s what the name Satan means. And he accuses us of sin. He uses God’s Law against us. And he’s right, or at least, he *was* right before Jesus atoned for sin. When Jesus died on the cross, he paid for all the sins of mankind. Therefore, Satan has lost his power to accuse. The sins he accuses you of have been atoned for. So he is flat out lying when he accuses us of sin. In this way, Jesus crushed the head of the serpent when he died on the cross.

To put it another way, he bound the devil. That’s the imagery Jesus uses in this parable. The scribes — they were Jewish religious leaders — they accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan.

And this is kind of interesting. Jesus was healing diseases and casting out demons. And many of the religious leaders opposed Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath day, when no work was to be done. Apparently, they considered healing people to be too strenuous. So they opposed Jesus, but they couldn’t deny the miracles. So what do they do? They attribute his power to the devil. Today’s skeptics would simply say that Jesus’ signs and wonders are legends, that they never actually happened. This is a convenient argument to make when you weren’t actually there. But the skeptics in Jesus’ day didn’t have that luxury. The evidence was right before them. They actually witnessed these things firsthand. So they had to come up with a different explanation. And the best they could come up with — as lame as it was — is that Jesus did these things by the power of the devil. And this is significant for us. Jesus’ critics couldn’t just write him off like today’s critics do. They had to deal with the evidence that was right in front of their faces.

Their argument is ridiculous, and Jesus exposes it. He tells this parable about how a kingdom or a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Abraham Lincoln famously used this passage as an argument against dividing up the United States. But that’s not really the way Jesus uses it. Jesus uses it to say that the accusation against him — that he casts out demons by the power of the devil — is logically absurd. Satan is not going to divide his kingdom against himself. He’s not going to fight against himself. It’s ridiculous. Jesus exposes just how far his critics have to reach in order to slander him.

Then Jesus goes on to say, “**No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house**” (3:27). This is

THE STRONGER MAN (Mark 3:20-35)

where Jesus reveals what is really going on. He is not in league with Satan, Jesus is binding Satan and plundering his kingdom. That's what all of these healings and exorcisms reveal.

We talk about knowing our enemy. Jesus calls Satan "**the strong man.**" But what happens to this strong man? Someone stronger comes along, ties him up, and then he can do whatever he wants. The thief can plunder everything in the house. This, like Genesis 3:15, is another picture of what Jesus did by his perfect life, death, and resurrection. The devil is the strong man. Jesus is the *stronger* man who plunders Satan's house.

And where are we in this parable? We are the goods that Jesus plunders. You're the lamp on the end table or the flatware in the drawer. Jesus steals you. It's not wrong though. He's really stealing you back. He's taking what is rightfully his. The devil had gained possession of us wrongly by deceiving our first parents. They sold themselves, and us, into slavery to sin, death, and the power of the devil. Jesus purchases us out of that slavery. Or, to put it in the terms of this parable, when Jesus paid the price for our sins, he took away Satan's power to accuse. This binds Satan. So those who once lived under Satan's accusation are now free from that power. Jesus binds Satan and takes us back, "in order that [we] might be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."

Jesus binds the devil so that he might no longer deceive the nations (Rev. 20:3). And Jesus speaks truth to you. He speaks the new reality to you, that your sins are forgiven because of his sacrifice, and this truth sets you free (John 8:32).

We have to know ourselves. We are weak. We are sinful. We don't even know how bad we are. We have to learn it from God's Word.

We have to know our enemy. The devil is crafty. He is strong. And his strength is his deception. When we are deceived by the devil, we don't even know it. That's the nature of deception.

And, more than anything else, we have to know our Savior. We cannot stand against the devil. Jesus is our Savior. He is our stronger man. He has crushed the serpent's head. He has plundered Satan's house. And he has taken you as his own. Amen

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.