

Luke 11:14-28 - Lent 3

Rev. Jeff Hendrix | Faith Lutheran Church

Luke 11:14-28

¹⁴Jesus drove out a demon, which was mute. After the demon had gone out, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. ¹⁵But some of them said, "He drives out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." ¹⁶Others were testing him by demanding of him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷But he knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is destroyed. And a house divided against itself falls. ¹⁸If Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? You say that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹But if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons drive them out? So they will be your judges. ²⁰Yet if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

²¹"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²²But when someone stronger attacks him and defeats him, he takes away that man's full armor, in which he had trusted, and divides up his plunder.

²³"The one who is not with me is against me. The one who does not gather with me scatters. ²⁴When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, but does not find any. Then it says, 'I will return to my house, the one I left.' ²⁵When it returns, it finds the house swept and put in order. ²⁶Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and dwell there. The last condition of that man becomes worse than the first."

²⁷While he was saying these things, a woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that carried you, and the breasts at which you nursed!"

²⁸But he said, "Even more blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

The Devil's Kingdom vs. Jesus' Kingdom

If you've studied American History, and particularly the Civil War, you'll remember that Abraham Lincoln quoted Luke 11:17: "Every kingdom divided against itself is destroyed. And a house divided against itself falls." Lincoln quoted in hopes to keep "these" United States *united*. In fact, it was only after the Civil War that the name for our country changed from "these" United States to "The" United States. A kingdom divided would fall.

While the verse has implications for households and countries, the intended application of this section has nothing to do with the state of the Union. In fact, it's about a completely different type of kingdom, two very different kingdoms.

One of these kingdoms belongs to the Devil. The other belongs to God. Neither one of them are physical Kingdoms, though physical people do live in them and belong to them.

In our text, Jesus had just healed a man who was mute and was demon possessed. But the reaction isn't what it should be. Some in the crowd begin to call this good thing 'evil'. Some in crowd basically say 'how dare you do such a good thing!' They said, "He drives out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."

Who they're referring to is Satan. The name *Beelzebul* here simply means "Lord of the Flies." It was a title given to Satan because their garbage dump, called Gehenna, outside the city was constantly in flames and stuff was burning, it smelled horrible. They used that place as a picture for hell. Well flies love to hang around garbage, so Satan was the ruler then, figuratively, of flies.

Gehenna, or the flaming Garbage dump, is a fitting picture of Satan's kingdom. In the old Testament, Gehenna was initially just a small valley. But it became the place where some of the

kings of Judah literally sacrificed their children by fire. And afterwards, the place was cursed, and became a garbage dump, the place where the flies live. In Satan's Kingdom, there is only destruction, decay, and death.

The crowd, after they saw what Jesus did, claimed He belonged to that kingdom. But the thing is, Jesus can't be a part of Satan's kingdom if he's openly fighting Satan. Jesus must be against him.

Jesus points out the foolishness in their thinking, but not to make them feel dumb, but warn them: *"Every kingdom divided against itself is destroyed. And a house divided against itself falls. If Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? You say that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. But if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons drive them out? So they will be your judges. Yet if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."*

The implication is that these people aren't fighting Satan, they're fighting Jesus, therefore, even though they don't realize it, they belong to Satan. Satan is deceitful, cunning, and strong. Satan, ironically, in getting them to think they were fighting against him, had gotten them to fight for him, against Jesus. They blasphemed Jesus. This is what Satan does, He uses half truths to get us to doubt or go against God.

He'll make us look at good things and call them evil. He'll make us focus on one good thing the church is doing, but then say, "wouldn't it be better if it did this?" He'll direct our attention to what we could do better. He'll sow division through even good things.

Jesus illustrates this next: He gives an illustration about a strong man who's all prepared for someone to break in. He's "fully armed" - he doesn't have a meager little hand weapon, He's got the most powerful stuff. He's gone through emergency planning. He's ready for whatever comes his way.

But then someone stronger comes, defeats him, takes away his weapons, and steals his stuff. The point is, the man trusted in his weapons, when he was never strong enough to begin with.

Satan was this stronger man. The people in the crowd, even though they thought were were prepared to watch out and go against Satan, they had been deceived by Satan already to call good 'evil' and to blaspheme Jesus. Humans are no match for Satan.

We need someone to fight with us, and to fight for us. That's Jesus. What Jesus is doing on earth is not helping Satan to gain a kingdom. Satan already *has* a kingdom! And he doesn't need any help holding onto it. No man can defeat him!

Instead, Jesus has come to the earth because He is the one, and only Man who is stronger than the devil. Jesus is the Son of God. And He has come to earth to redeem us, to redeem sinful men from the devil's kingdom, the flaming pit of garbage, to bring us into His perfect kingdom. Jesus' kingdom isn't a smoldering dark valley, eternally on fire; It's holy, set apart, and glorious, free from decay, destruction and death, streaming with light and life.

Those who trust in Christ are delivered out of the kingdom of darkness and placed in the kingdom of Christ. But those who reject Christ remain trapped in the kingdom of the devil. Jesus gives a warning: "The one who is not with me is against me. The one who does not gather with me scatters." To be with Christ is to trust in *Him* for help against our great enemies: sin, death, and the devil. To gather with Christ is to hear His Word and to do His works.

Make no mistake, there is no middle ground when it comes to these two kingdoms. There is no half-hearted Christianity. There's not multiple paths to God. There is either faith that works in love and obedience to Christ, or there is unbelief. You're either in the kingdom of the devil, or in the kingdom of Christ.

Jesus then issues a final warning. He describes what we cannot see, what a demon does when it's cast out. It wanders around for awhile, and then returns to its former home. And if he finds it "swept and put in order," it brings along "seven other spirits more evil than himself," so that "the last condition of that man becomes worse than the first."

In other words, if the demon finds that your heart is vacant, without the Holy Spirit dwelling there, it'll move back in. This isn't just a warning to those who have been possessed by a demon and then been exorcised, like the mute man in the text. It's also a warning to those who hear the Gospel, which drives out sin and demons and brings with it the Holy Spirit, but who then grow tired of hearing that Gospel. Only Jesus, working through the Gospel, can defeat the Devil.

Finally, at the end of our text, there's this seemingly random shout out from the crowd from a woman: "*Blessed is the womb that carried you, and the breasts at which you nursed!*" But he said, "*Even more blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.*"

Jesus perfectly sums up how we are taken out of the devil's kingdom and how His kingdom comes to us. Christ's kingdom doesn't come by any human effort, nor are we taken out of the devil's kingdom by any human effort. As we heard on Wednesday as Jesus described His kingdom that's not of this world, God's Kingdom comes even without our asking: "The kingdom of God comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity."¹

Through His Word and Sacraments, Christ brings His kingdom to you. He gives you the Holy Spirit, and He kicks Satan out. You are God's house. Christ lives in you. He's established His kingdom in your heart through faith. Through your Baptism, Christ joined you to Himself. Through His Word, God gives you faith to believe that Jesus came to redeem you from the devil's kingdom by His holy, precious blood. Through the Lord's Supper, God strengthens and preserves you in the one true faith, to life everlasting, until He'll bring you to His eternal Kingdom forever safe from the devil's attacks.

You and I are not strong enough to go against the devil, but Jesus is. By faith in Christ, you are a member of His kingdom. Christ dwells with you. The devil may lie and try to deceive you, he's strong...But Jesus is stronger. Don't be strong in yourself, be strong in Christ. He has overcome the devil. And sing confidently with David, as his words are recorded in today's First Lesson, "I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies" ...from

¹ Luther's Explanation to the 2nd Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come"

all your enemies, including the devil.

Amen.