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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY  
Oculi (Third Sunday in Lent)  
March 4, 2018  
Text: Luke 11:14–28

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

During the liturgies for baptism and confirmation, these questions are asked of the person being baptized and also those being confirmed:

Do you renounce the devil? Yes, I renounce him.  
Do you renounce all his works? Yes, I renounce them.  
Do you renounce all his ways? Yes, I renounce them (*LSB Agenda*, p. 8, 29).

These questions are even asked of confirmed members who are being received into a congregation's membership via transfer (*LSB Agenda*, p. 32).

Martin Luther's baptismal liturgy forgoes the questions and simply issues a command: "Depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit" (*LSB Agenda*, p. 13). In light of today's gospel reading, I wonder if we shouldn't reconsider using Luther's baptismal rite.

Once the devil has been renounced and/or cast out, the person being baptized receives the sign of the holy cross "both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified" (*LSB Agenda*, p. 6, 13).

Why all the fuss about the devil in our baptismal, confirmation, and membership liturgies? Today's gospel text provides answer to why we must cling to God's Word in our day to day lives of faith and obedience as well as a renewed appreciation for our liturgies providing us a framework for understanding the devil, his works, and his ways.

Today's text from Luke 11 describes Jesus casting out a demon who caused the one possessed to be mute and probably deaf. He couldn't speak. The Lord Jesus cast out the demon and the man spoke to the amazement of everyone. Our modern sensibilities try to turn this into some kind of clinical situation, a medical wonder maybe, but one with a rational, logical explanation. Don't be fooled for a moment. The physical

manifestations of deaf/muteness were a direct result of demon possession. Only the powerful word of the Savior could change this situation. Jesus saved this man from a demon. And we trust the Lord saved Him from eternal condemnation along with all demons.

Remember those liturgies I mentioned briefly mentioned earlier. All them, in their own ways, direct us to the powerful word of Christ, our Savior. Baptism directs us to the promise that the word in and with the water – I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit – works the forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe. The rites of Confirmation and the reception of membership via transfer all harken back to the saving word of God in spoken and given in baptism. “Do you this day in the presence of God and of this congregation acknowledge the gifts that God gave you in your Baptism?” (LSB *Agenda*, p. 29, 32). A Holy Spirit given faith is then inspired to make a clear, public confession of faith in Christ Jesus. And we have Christ’s promise that even as we are confessing Him before men, He is confessing us before His Father in heaven (Matt. 10:32).

Today’s text and our liturgies remind us that Christ gave us His Word, Sacraments, everything pertaining to the ministry of preaching, as the means by which His work of casting out Satan, his works, and ways continues to this day. Christ Himself gave us the promise that through His ministry of Word and Sacrament, He is present among us to the very end of the age. “We Christians who know and believe God’s Word should see and be comforted in our hearts and minds that God has given to us the power here upon earth to continue to drive out the devil. In fact, it is our call and duty to continue to do so until Christ comes again (paraphrase of Luther in *House Postils*, v. 5. p. 330). This is the Church’s ministry, first and foremost.

We have the mandate from Christ Himself to comfort and encourage each other with the pronouncement of God’s grace. When we feel overwhelmed and overcome by fear, the devil, or any form of spiritual uncertainty, then we are to encourage each other to hear God’s Word, to remember our baptism and proclaim that we have the forgiveness of all sins because of Christ, and we should earnestly seek the body and blood of Jesus in the Holy Supper. When such faith and confidence are found in God’s Word, it is impossible for the devil to hold dominion over us (Luther in *House Postils*, v. 5, p. 331). There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).

The crowd witnessed Christ's powerful word in action when our Lord cast out a demon. Some marveled. But others scoffed at this event declaring that Jesus "casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons" (vs. 15). Beelzebul refers to the ancient Canaanite male fertility god, Baal. Beelzebul means "prince Baal, lord of the earth" (Just, p. 473). The crowd is accusing Jesus of using the power of Satan himself to cast out a demon. In other words, they accuse Jesus of using demonic, evil powers to further the Kingdom of God. For Jesus claimed time and time again, that God's kingdom has come among them through His ministry among them. To claim that Jesus' ministry is empowered by Satan, the prince of demons, is a sacrilegious sneer, an heinous sin against Christ and the Holy Spirit who anointed Jesus for the purpose of doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:38).

Our Lord's answer and then His subsequent admonition provide us with much to consider. First, Satan is not divided against himself. Common sense teaches "every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls (vs. 17). Satan's kingdom is absolutely unified in its goals of destroying faith, obscuring God's truth, defiling bodies, consciences, and souls, inflaming pride, avarice, wrath and anger, lust and covetousness, death, despair, and every form of shame and destructive vice.

Second, Jesus declares that His own ministry is one empowered by the finger of God. "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come among you" (vs. 20). Our Lord is making a most remarkable claim by using that phrase, "the finger of God." It's a divine claim. For the 10 Commandments were originally written by the finger of God (Ex. 31:8, Dt. 9:10). The Egyptian magicians told Pharaoh that the plague of gnats that afflicted their land was the finger of God working against them (Ex. 8:19). The same divine power at work in those situations was at work in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. God's kingdom had come among them in Jesus! Satan is driven out. The life and love and victory of God's kingdom has arrived...in Jesus. That's what taking place in baptism, in preaching and worship, in receiving Christ's body and blood, God's kingdom comes among us!

There can be no neutrality or fence sitting when it comes to Jesus. "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (vs. 23). It's either God's kingdom or Satan's tyranny. The Biblical description of reality, of what life is like in this world, is very black and white. Satan or Christ. No buffer zone. Saints of God, we must teach our children and grandchildren the truth. There is a

furious battle waging around us every day. Saving faith in Jesus provides safety and true joy. Any rejection of Jesus, of His Word and truth, is doing the work of Satan.

Finally, our Lord provides a caution we must hear and take to heart. It's not enough for Satan to be cast out and his works and ways to be renounced. They must be replaced, replaced with Christ and the Holy Spirit. "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person (like the demon cast out of the deaf/mute)...seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' ... Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself...And the last state of that person is worse than the first" (vs. 24–26).

Dear saints of God, I am not given to hyperbole or over-the-top dramatics. But we must heed Christ's warning here. There is nothing more important than fear, loving, and trusting in God above all things. Such fear, love, and trust in God is created within our hearts by the Holy Spirit as Christ's ministry continues among us by hearing His Word and receiving His Sacraments.

There is so much I want to say to you here. There is nothing more important than the kingdom of Christ coming among us. To you husbands and wives, parents and grandparents, do not allow jobs, school, extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, etc), entertainment, or whatever keep your loved ones from God's kingdom found in Christ's Word and Sacraments. All of you know me and my family. We are not opposed to these kinds of things. Our kids participate in many, many activities. But do not allow them to keep you away from Church, prayer, God's Word, public worship, etc. I am convinced that the time has now come that we Christians must make hard choices. If the activity requires that you miss Church on a regular, consistent basis, say no. Even if it cost you in various ways. Seek Christ's kingdom first, choose the eternal things.

Let me be even more concrete. No high school graduate should consider going to any college or university or relocate to take a job in any place where he cannot be fed and nourished week after week in a faithful Lutheran congregation. The first question that should be asked is, "Is there a faithful Lutheran congregation in that place where the finger of God is at work?" If the answer is no. Then do not go regardless of the scholarships promised or the opportunities provided.

Similar things can be said about whom our Christian youth should and should not date, court, and eventually marry. God's Word teaches us not to be unequally yoked

with unbelievers (II Cor. 6:14). Marriage is good. And should be sought out as God's good gift. We prepare for Christian marriage by living as virtuous Christians during our single years. Pray for and seek out a Lutheran spouse knowing he or she is praying for the same.

Similar things can be said about how we use our money and material resources. God's Word teaches us, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (I Tim. 6:10). Use your money and resources to further the kingdom of God among us. To be sure, that includes our offerings in Church. But it also includes using your resources in godly, Christian way at home and throughout your work-a-day week.

Remember our Lord's warning, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." And remember our Lord's encouragement, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (vs. 28). The blessed life is one found living in, with, and under God's Word. We must never forget that Jesus is the Stronger One who has overcome Satan, his works and ways. That's what happened to you all when you were baptized: Christ overcoming Satan and casting him out. We gather today to hear God's Word and to see, by faith, the finger of God at work among us. God in Christ forgiving our sins be they big or small, renewing our hearts and minds, strengthening our faith, claiming us as His own dear children regardless of the world tells us. This is the truth of the matter. Christ in us the hope of glory for you are all marked by the sign of the holy cross. May our Lord's work always abound among us with joy and thanksgiving.

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.