

“Spiritual Victory”

Luke 10:17-20

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we come into what people who aren't Texans like to call some weird phenomenon called “Fall,” we find ourselves squarely in the throes of many people's favorite time of the year—Football Season! All your favorite teams prepare for their weekly battle against an opponent, and they work to find weaknesses they can exploit, fine tune their offense, and essentially get ready to go to war with another team. It's thrilling, at times heartbreaking, joyful, and in the end, there is one who wins, and one who loses. In our text this morning, Jesus tells His disciples following their return from being out in the country healing diseases, casting out demons, and performing miracles, that He “saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” He saw the victory that was so great, that Satan himself was cast down to earth. The power of the name of the Lord with which the disciples performed their great deeds, had won them the victory.

But that victory was not a great display of power and might as they overcame their foe. There were no cheerleaders, band, or fans in the stands screaming and cheering, watching as they returned the kickoff for a touchdown. Sure, people saw the works they did as they went out proclaiming the kingdom of the Lord was at hand. But the real victory was one that can't be seen or quantified. It is not one that has a scoreboard that keeps up with the game for you. Jesus commends the seventy-two as they return because of the spiritual victory that was won behind the scenes. It wasn't they that accomplished anything, for as Christ says, “I have given you authority...”. And nevertheless, they ought not rejoice in this victory over the devil, because the greatest joy they have is the truth that their names are written in heaven, that they have spiritual victory for the sake of Christ who gives them their authority.

The victory is won by Christ. Satan is cast out of heaven like lightning because of what Christ has come into the world to do, because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The disciples come back with such excitement over what they have done, and that is what the sinful flesh wants them to do. It's not that they shouldn't feel a proper sense of pride for the work that was accomplished through them, but that pride becomes a weapon of the evil one and his demons. He and his fellow fallen angels prowl the world seeking to devour the faithful of God. The disciples were providing support for the spiritual battle through the proclamation they went out proclaiming, and the angels of the Lord were strengthened by the work that Christ was doing here on earth. So, in an effort to gain the

upper hand, the devil worked to turn the sinful flesh of the seventy-two against the work of Jesus. And the sinful flesh is all too willing to accommodate.

That's the daily battle of every Christian in the world today. The same pride wells up within each and every one of you as well when you do good works. "Wow, I really did a good thing for the Lord today." Your Old Adam pats you on the back and tells you how great you are and what an amazing job you did. Because turning you inward to yourself is the way that the spiritual victory is stifled. It is not you that does anything good for the Lord anyway. That is a battle that the flesh wages against the soul on a daily basis. It works tirelessly to convince you that you are the one who has done all the work, that you are the one who allowed Jesus into your life, and so the blessings he gives you are a reward for being such a great Christian. That pride that seeks to make your faith a worldly victory is a notion that Jesus destroys with one simple statement. "I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you."

Your flesh doesn't give you any power over serpents and scorpions, literally or figuratively. It doesn't give you the ability to overpower the enemy, because it is an undercover agent of the evil one. And because of that, it certainly doesn't care about whether or not it hurts you. The Old Adam in all of you is in cahoots with Satan, stealing signs from the other team in order to use it as leverage to win the victory over Christ. Your sinful desires are what you seek at every turn, because gratifying the desires of the flesh is what the evil one knows will weaken your faith and make you prime fodder in his battle for your soul. That doesn't mean there is no hope. That does not mean that the evil one has accomplished the victory. Because the reality is that he is already defeated. And that is not your work, but Christ's that has accomplished it.

Paul says in Romans 13:14, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." In the water of baptism, you have had the Lord Jesus Christ placed upon you and because He dwells in you by the inworking of the Holy Spirit, no provision is made for the flesh any longer. That is what Bella and Kyndall experienced this morning. That is what you witnessed in their washing away of the stain of sin. And in confessing your sins and being absolved in the name and authority of Christ, you were joined with them in that same Baptism. It is a great reminder from Luther in the Small Catechism, that you are to daily kill the Old Adam and its sin and evil desires by contrition and repentance, that the new man created in you in Baptism would daily rise and live before God in righteousness forever. You are made new in those waters. You are made new by the work of Jesus who has gone to the cross to redeem you and make you righteous in the sight of your Heavenly Father.

Nothing else has the power to overcome the evil one and the sinful flesh. Only the death of Jesus can and has already overcome the power of the devil and your flesh. His blood shed for you has written your name in heaven, and nothing can rip you away from the love of God in Christ Jesus. You do not rejoice that by the inworking of the Holy Spirit you are able to do good works. You do not rejoice in the fact that you can say to the devil, "Get behind me Satan!" You rejoice that by the blood of the Lamb who was slain your name is written in His book of life. He assures you that the victory is won on your behalf through the proclamation of His Gospel and in the giving of His Sacraments. By His gifts, and not your deeds, your faith receives the forgiveness He brings to you by those means of grace. And that forgiveness which is a free gift of His grace makes Satan squirm and writhe, because it eliminates any hope of him gaining control over your soul.

By hearing the preaching of Christ and Him crucified, demons are subject to you in His name. There is no demon who can stand in the presence of the preached Gospel and stand strong against it. The weapon of the Lord is His Word, for it "is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12)." The fallen angels run in fear as they face the truth of His Word. There is the spiritual battle that is waged in the heavenly places. The angels of the Lord are the wind that fans the flame of His Word. Hebrews 1:7, "Of the angels He says, "He makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire." And the reality of that is in the Word. The Word is spoken by His ministers in truth, creating a flaming fire that strikes fear into the devil and his armies, and the angels are the wind that carries the fire of that Word into battle, to destroy the ones who seek to destroy your faith at all costs.

Satan is constantly reminded of his fall "like lightning." In the power of the Word, he is reminded of it over and over again. By the work of Christ, it is shoved in his face everywhere he turns. And you are reminded that because of that same Word of promise, and the work of Your Savior, that you are under the care of a loving Father, who sent His only Son to die the death you deserve and bring you your salvation. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven by Jesus, written in His blood to assure you of the promise of everlasting life in His name. He further assures you of that in giving you the gift of His body and blood in His Holy Supper. When you partake of this heavenly food, you are taken to the Lamb's High Feast, where all the saints sit at the Lord's table and eat the food of salvation. Because that is indeed what it gives. By His very body and blood, present for you to eat and to drink, you are forgiven of all of your sins, given everlasting life, and assured that the promise of salvation has been fulfilled by His work upon the cross.

The seventy-two return in joy having done great works in the name of the Lord. Jesus brings them “back down to earth” reminding them that there is no score to keep against the powers of darkness. The victory has already been won, and it is one that they cannot yet see on this side of judgment day. It is a spiritual victory that was won before the world was created, just as it says in Ephesians 1:4, “even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.” You are His elect people, greater than even the angels, because you have been chosen as His own dear son, adopted into sonship through the waters of your Baptism. There is no worldly battle to be fought. The angels and demons battle in the spiritual realm over your soul, but the outcome of that is already in view. Christ will come again to fulfill the promise of salvation, to bring you home into the heavenly dwelling of your Father. He will return with His angels accompanying Him, to raise the dead and judge the world. Your judgment on that day has already been assured. You have been declared justified for the sake of Jesus, and because of that truth you will dwell in the glory of the Lord, never to face the battles of the flesh again as you live in everlasting perfection in the presence of God and the Lamb forever. Amen.