**St. Paul’s Lutheran Church
Wildwood, Missouri**

**The Feast of St. Michael and All the Angels
Revelation 12: 7-12
September 29, 2019**

 One of my favorite movies is a film starring Paul Newman called *Cool Hand Luke*. The movie has been around since 1967 and is seemingly on cable all the time so I think I am pretty safe in hazarding a guess that most of you have at least heard of it. However, if you haven’t, it’s the story about a man named Luke who, after cutting the heads off of parking meters, finds himself sentenced to hard labor in a prison work camp. Considered a classic, it has left its mark on the culture with its most memorable line, *“What we have here is a failure to communicate,”* and its most memorable scene where Luke, on a bet, eats 50 hardboiled eggs in an hour.

 However, early in the film there is a fight scene between Newman, rather, Luke, and George Kennedy who played the big man on campus, or, I suppose to be more accurate, the big man on the prison block. As they square off in the prison yard it doesn’t take much to realize that Luke is going to get his *“clock cleaned”* because Kennedy dwarfs him in size. And that is exactly what happens. Undersized and overmatched, Luke absolutely gets the tar beat out of him.

 With every blow, Kennedy literally knocks him flat on his back. However, and this is the surprise, each time Luke staggers back to his feet to take some more punishment. He just won’t quit. Finally, Kennedy, with the hope of ending what had turned into a fiasco, halls off and gives him a mighty blow to jaw. As Luke, reeling from the punch lays on the ground, Kennedy leans over and says, *“It’s over. Stay down. You’re beat.”* Luke wouldn’t accept that, however. He would not accept defeat and, as expected, he staggers back to his feet to stubbornly continue a fight that he just can’t win.

 My dear friends in Christ, in our text for today from Revelation, as we celebrate this festival of *St. Michael and All Angels*, we seem to have a little bit of a mixed bag. On the one hand, the good news, the great news, the glorious news is that Satan, our enemy has been defeated. He who has brought sin and misery and death into this world and sin and misery and death into each of our lives has been conquered. With Jesus’ death and resurrection, the final blow has been dealt. There is no longer any place for him in heaven. He can no longer stand before God and accuse us of our sin. It’s over. He is beat.

All of that is very good, isn’t it? However, there is a problem: at least for now, even though he has been thoroughly beaten by our Lord, he just won’t stay down. The bad news in our text for today is that Satan hasn’t accepted his defeat very graciously. No, Satan is still fighting and unfortunately, knowing that he cannot beat God, knowing that that’s a fight he just cannot win, you and I are now his targets. You need to be aware of that and you need to know how to defend yourself against his attacks because he will come after you.

 Now, it seems that whenever you venture into St. John’s Revelation you are faced with bizarre and troubling stuff. So much of what St. John writes seems as if he is having flashbacks from a bad *“acid trip”* in the 1960’s (not that I have any personal experience with that). And so our reading for tonight, at least in that regard, does not disappoint because it begins with what is really an outrageously peculiar thing: there was a war in heaven. If that doesn’t strike you as odd, then you need to think about it a bit. Could there be anything more out of place than a war in heaven? That there should be war in heaven before God is almost unthinkable. Is not heaven that place of ultimate peace? Should not serenity reign in heaven? Of course, but St. John words are clear: Satan takes God to war.

 Now, it is important that we understand the context here. This is not Satan’s first rebellion against God that Jesus speaks about in Luke, chapter 10 where he says, *“I saw Satan fall like lightening from heaven.”* No, this battle took place after Jesus’ victorious death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead and his ascension to sit at the right hand of God. John is telling us something that has already occurred. What is going on here is exactly what Jesus predicted would happen just prior to his crucifixion in John, chapter 12*, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."*  Our reading is about how Jesus, after defeating Satan on the cross, entered heaven to throw him out for good. Jesus won the fight and he has returned to his rightful place in heaven to cast out the ruler of this world and the accuser of men.

 So, the time came for the Lord to kick Satan out of heaven.  God called upon Michael and his fellow angels to be His enforcers.  John tells us that there was no longer any place for him in heaven. The devil had become a trespasser on God's property, and the holy angels were the policemen, so to speak, who made sure that he left.

 However, as you can imagine, Satan, who did not find it too bold to rebel against God in the first place, didn’t exactly want to go quietly.  It became necessary to boot them out by force.  Thus, there was war in heaven, a titanic struggle between the angelic hosts of heaven and the hosts of hell.  Michael and his angels won and there was a great celebration in heaven.

 However, while this is war started in heaven it unfortunately came to earth. As our text says, *“And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”* While that is certainly good news for heaven, it is not such good news for us and John goes on to tell us why, *“But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”*

 Again, as you can well imagine, Satan wasn’t all that keen about Jesus kicking him out of heaven. In fact, he’s pretty ticked off and even though he, like Cool Hand Luke, knows this is a fight he cannot win, knowing that he is beaten and he should just stay down, he is still fighting. Unfortunately, his attention is on you and me.

My dear friends in Christ, you need to understand this, Satan knows he has lost, he knows he is going down and his goal is to bring you and me and every Christian down with him. And while stubbornness moved Cool Hand Luke to keep getting up, Satan is simply motivated by spite and hatred. So hateful and so spiteful is he over losing his fight with Jesus that he wants to inflict as much pain and damage as he can on those God loves. And keep this in mind, as I often tell my bible classes, Satan is a great time manager. He wastes little time on unbelievers because he already has them. No, the majority of his time is spent on you and me that we might fall from faith and join him in hell. And let me warn you, in this fight it is you and I who are undersized and overmatched. Satan is way more powerful than us and we underestimate him to our own peril.

 Now, you may think that I am just trying to make you paranoid, but it is not paranoia if it is true. Satan is out to get you and you need to understand how he works. Unfortunately, I think that when it comes to the Devil too many of us get our theology from Hollywood. Consequently, we think that Satan is this ghoulish figure who wants to kill you but only after scaring yesterday’s dinner out of you. However, Satan’s goal is not your physical death. In fact, if you die as a Christian, he’s lost the fight. No, Satan wants your eternal death and he is very willing to have you alive because then he has a chance at deceiving you.

 And that is his chief weapon: deception. Satan has had thousands of years of practice wielding it and he does so skillfully and effectively to lead people away from Jesus. You need to know that your enemy works subtly. There will never be a frontal attack. He’s not going to jump out from around the corner in red tights, a tale, horns and a pitchfork and say, *“Boo. Don’t believe in Jesus anymore.*” No, he’ll work on you bit by bit so that you are in hell with the doors locked before you realize it. In his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis writes from the perspective of a demon giving advice to a young tempter on how to make man stray from God. Here is what he says, *“It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards will do the trick. Indeed the safest road to hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signpost.”*

Satan is not trying to turn you into a sinner. You are already one of those. No he wants to nudge you in the opposite direction of Christ and he will do it by hook or by crook so that what you become is an unbelieving sinner. If he can do that by slowly eroding the truth of God’s Word in your life, he’ll do it. If he can get you to believe like the unbelieving world, to accept its views in place of the bible, all the better. If he can get you start discarding the parts of the bible that you just don’t like, then he already has a foothold. If he can convince you that sleeping in on Sunday’s is more beneficial to you than church, because, after all, you work really hard during the week and you deserve a day of rest, he will. If he can deceive you into buying the philosophies of this world, that all religions are equal and that all roads lead to God, he’ll do that too. If he can trick you into believing that all a person has to do is to be good to get into heaven, then he’ll be tickled. If he can convince you that you have committed certain sins that God cannot forgive, he will do that also. In fact, that is probably his favorite means of attack. He loves to make you feel that your past sins placed you beyond the reach of Jesus’ salvation so that in despair, you just give up. Satan is cruel and relentless and will not give up until the fires of hell are licking at your feet.

 Am I trying to frighten you? You bet I am. I want you to know your enemy and to take him seriously. He will use whatever deceitful means he can to make you abandon your faith. He is no one with which to trifle and you need to remember that. However, there is something else we need to remember; something that is more important: he is already beaten; he is a defeated foe.

 My dear friends in Christ, do you want to know what protects us from Satan? The blood of the Lamb is what protects of from Satan’s attacks. Yes, Satan is powerful and forceful but Jesus has defeated him and our defense against his attacks is to remember exactly that. We stand in the protection of the shadow of Jesus’ cross. Because the cross is not only Jesus’ victory, it is our victory. We win. We come out on top not because of anything that we have done but because of what Jesus has done for us.

 My fellow saints, do you realize how encouraging this text is for we who do suffer Satan’s attacks? St. John has given us this unbelievable glimpse into this unseen world of angels and archangels to show us all that Christ’s death and resurrection accomplished for us.  The very first Gospel promise that God made in the bible was that the Seed of woman would crush the serpent's head.  This Jesus did. Christ came to deal the death blow to that serpent of old, and to all the legions of demons who followed him in his kingdom of darkness.  Over these, Christ triumphed at the Cross and at the Empty Tomb.

 On top of that, for centuries upon centuries before Christ came, God tolerated Satan in his presence and all the while do you know what he would do? He would accuse. He would accuse you. He would accuse me. He would accuse all the world of its sins. He would point out all the wrong we had done, all the times we had been unfaithful, all the occasions when we rejected God’s will in our life. All this Satan laid out before the eyes of God as if a prosecuting attorney literally hell bent on proving our guilt. And, in proving our guilt, he insisted that we receive the due punishment for our sins, meaning, death.

 But that changed.  When Christ shed His Blood for the whole world, when he shed his blood for you and me, he covered and paid for our sins.  On behalf of Christ, God's chosen people are declared not guilty.  You and I are declared not guilty. Now, really think about this for a moment: now cleansed by the blood of Jesus, of what can Satan now accuse you? For which one of your sins did Jesus not die? To be sure, at least speaking for myself, my list of sins is endless and there is much of which Satan could accuse me. But that list has been erased by the blood of Jesus and now, God sees me, he sees you and all who believe as his holy people who are free from sin and who do not deserve eternal death but eternal life.

 Therefore, God had no reason to tolerate Satan's presence any longer.  Every accusation Satan tries to raise against any one of us becomes a complete falsehood.  As St. Paul tells us in Romans 8, *“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us.”* We saints are holy in God's judgment.  It is not that we are holy in our actions, by which we sin daily.  But on account of Christ, by grace through faith, we are immaculately pure and clean and therefore immune to any of the devil's accusations. Satan can no longer call you *“sinner”* because Jesus now calls you *“saint!”*

 Oh, Satan’s still going to try. However, if he tries to bring up your past, just remind him of his future for as our text says, *“his time is short.”* His final end is coming. He has very little time left and while we take Satan seriously, we fear him not. I like the Martin Luther puts it in the hymn that is the anthem of our Lutheran faith, *“This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will, he can harm us none. He’s judged, the deed is done.”* He may keep coming at us, but this is a fight he cannot win. Jesus has crushed his head. God’s holy angels have cast him out of heaven and the victory is ours and because of Jesus we can be so bold as to stand over him and say, “*“It really is over. Stay down. You’re beat.”* To God be the glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.