

Worship for the Weekend of March 29, 2020

In Our World Today ... we have an enemy at work to confuse us, distract us, and pull us into the dark.

In Our Worship Today ... we see our way to victory over this enemy - through Jesus Christ our Lord!

ALL: This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Confession and Absolution

Today we use one of the tools and treasures in Christian Worship, found on page 154 and also printed out for you here.

M: In the name of our God, to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hidden. Amen.

Minister and Penitent:

**O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy,
and in your faithfulness, come to my relief.**

**Do not bring your servant into judgment,
for no one living is righteous before you.**

Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails.

Do not hide your face from me, for I have put my trust in you.

**Show me the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.**

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.

Penitent:

Almighty God, merciful Father,

**I, a troubled and repentant sinner,
confess that I have sinned against you
in my thoughts, my words, and my actions.**

I have not loved you with my whole heart.

I have not loved others as I should.

**I am distressed by the sins that trouble me
and am deeply sorry for them.**

Here the penitent may confess specific sins.

Minister:

Jesus says to his people, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven."
His death paid for the guilt of your sins and the sins of the whole world.
Do you believe this?

Penitent:

Yes, I believe.

Minister:

Because of the promise of our Savior Jesus, I forgive you all your sins.
Be assured that you are a dear child of God and an heir of eternal life.

Minister and Penitent:

**O Lord, my God, I called to you for help, and you answered me.
I thank you for the love you have shown me in Jesus Christ, my Savior.
Through him you have rescued me from the guilt of my sin
and given me the peace of forgiveness.
Help me fight against temptation,
correct whatever wrongs I can,
and serve you
and those around me
with love and good works.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.**

Hymn - *Christian Worship Supplement* - 760

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say, *Refrain*

*"It is well, it is well with my soul!"
It is well with my soul!
It is well, it is well with my soul!"*

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to His Cross, and I bear it no more;
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! *Refrain*

And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend;
Even so, it is well with my soul. *Refrain*

Prayer of the Day

Lord our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your Word, and when we fall, raise us up again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

First Lesson

Ephesians 6:10-12

Paul likely wrote this while he was cooped up as a prisoner.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Apostles Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.**

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

**the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,**

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Hymn - *Christian Worship* 116

In the hour of trial, Jesus, plead for me
Lest by base denial I unworthy be.
When you see me waver, With a look recall,
Nor for fear or favor Ever let me fall.

With forbidden pleasures Should this vain world charm
Or its tempting treasures Spread to work me harm,
Bring to my remembrance Sad Gethsemane
Or, in darker semblance, Cross-crowned Calvary.

Should your mercy send me Sorrow, toil, and woe,
Or should pain attend me On my path below,
Grant that I may never Fail your cross to view;
Grant that I may ever Cast my care on you.

When my life is ending, Though in grief or pain,
When my body changes Back to dust again,
On your truth relying, Through that mortal strife,
Jesus, take me, dying, To eternal life.

Sermon

Ephesians 6:12

It's that small - too small to be seen with the human eye, too small to be seen with most microscopes. And yet around the world, hundreds, maybe thousands of the world's smartest people are trying to see it, study it, know it - the corona virus, COVID-19. Why? We're in a life or death battle with that virus. Left unchecked, it could kill who knows how many. So we want to know as much as we can - where it came from, how it spreads, what it does, and most of all - how we can stop it.

You and I have another enemy, another enemy giving us a life or death fight. It's not getting the same attention as the corona virus, but the stakes are higher, not just life or death in this world, but life or death forever. It's not getting as much attention as the corona virus, so sometimes we need a reminder. Sometimes our lives are so comfortable that we forget we're in a fight for our lives. Sometimes we have so many answers, solutions, fixes, cures that we forget we're in the midst of a life or death fight. But no matter how comfortable we are, no matter how much in control we might feel, the enemy is still out there.

Just as we want to know the corona virus - how it works, how it spreads, how we can stop it, so we need to know this much more dangerous enemy. Paul clues us in: **“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** We're not up against flesh and blood - enemies made of the same stuff as we are, enemies we can take on by ourselves. No, our struggle is against **“the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”**

Paul isn't just being dramatic. We're not talking fictional ghosts. Paul is talking about the devil and his demons. We might think we can mess around with them, fun and games with the Ouija board, card-readers, psychic mind-readers. We might joke: “the devil made me do it.” But the devil and his demons are no joking matter. They aren't looking to just mess with us, spook us, scare us. They are out to rule, to have their way, to overpower us. They are out to separate you from God, to put you on the wrong side of God.

How? Satan lies. He lies, he pretends, he confuses, he distracts - all to put us in the dark so we don't see things as they really are. Let me count off four ways -

One - He lies about who God is and how God is. He lies about how God judges; he lies about how God forgives. Sometimes he makes God out to be the scowling, angry judge who could never forgive you. Sometimes he makes God out to be an "anything-goes-god" who lets anything and everything go. He lies so we don't see God as he really is. Anything to confuse and distract, to get us in the dark and separate us from God.

Two - He lies about who you are. Sometimes he lies that you are so good you deserve God's approval; sometimes he lies that you are so evil God could never love you. He lies so we don't see ourselves as we really are, as God sees us. Anything to confuse and distract, to get us in the dark and separate us from God.

Three - He lies about right and wrong, good and evil. He calls right wrong, and he calls wrong right. Anything to confuse and distract, to get us in the dark and separate us from God.

Four - He lies about himself, pretending to be on our side. Anything to confuse and distract, to get us in the dark and separate us from God.

Anything - he'll say anything, use anything - your guilt and your goodness, your hopes and your fears, your pride and your insecurity, your purity, your perversity, your desire to fit in, your desire to be your own person - he'll say anything, use anything to confuse and distract, to get you in the dark and separate you from God.

How do you fight against that? With the corona virus, we might have some idea what to do. But how do you defend yourself against a master liar who is a master at twisting words? How do you fight and defend yourself against an invisible, mysterious force of evil spirits working in the dark? In other words, how do you fight darkness? How? With light! And how do you fight the darkness of Satan? With the light of Jesus Christ!

Now, before I talk about our fight (or how we fight), let's talk about Jesus' fight. The devil tried to confuse Jesus, distract Jesus, tried to get Jesus to doubt God, give up on God, to do things his own way. But Jesus kept answering Satan's lies with Truth; he kept on answering the world's hate with love; he kept on answering the world's indifference to God by keeping on with God, trusting God, turning to God; yes, he kept on answering darkness with light. No matter what, he

kept on - he couldn't, he wouldn't be distracted, but he went all the way to the cross.

If you're the devil and you see Jesus on the cross, what do you think? "I've got him!" The devil had Jesus surrounded by the darkness of evil, surrounded by the darkness of death. He had Jesus surrounded by the darkness of God's judgment. But the darkness of evil couldn't break Jesus away from God. The darkness of death couldn't break Jesus' spirit. Even the darkness of God's judgment couldn't break Jesus' trust in God. What the devil didn't seem to realize was that Jesus came for the darkness. He came to face the darkness and guilt of the world and take it as his own. He came to face the darkness of God's judgment and take it as his own. Jesus came to face the darkness and to overcome the darkness with his light. While the devil was thinking: "Now I've got him," Jesus was getting ready to shout: "It is finished." The darkness of God's judgment was satisfied. The darkness of our guilt was paid for. The darkness of the devil couldn't stop Jesus. Jesus kept on speaking Truth; he kept on showing love; he kept on trusting and turning to God.

How could Jesus keep on? No matter how the devil tried to distract him and confuse him, Jesus kept his eyes on God's Word and promise. He knew that no matter how dark it would get, in the end God would keep his Word. He knew God would keep his Word and deliver him. He knew God would keep his Word and deliver you. Yes, he knew God would keep his Word and bring you into his light.

Today you have the light of Jesus. But the darkness of the devil is still out there (working to get his way in here). Why? Like a cornered terrorist, he wants to take as many with him as he can. Like a bitter loser, he counts your misery as his victory.

So how do we fight? Like Jesus. We answer darkness with the light of Jesus; we answer Satan's lies with the Truth of Jesus. When he tries to darken us about right and wrong, we go to his Word. When he tries to confuse us about who we are, we go to his Word. When he tries to confuse us about who God is, we go to his Word.

Do you see a problem with what I just said? It's all reactive, not proactive. It's letting the devil have the first shot, and then hitting back. You know your enemy. Don't wait for the devil to take his shot. Don't wait for the devil to distract and confuse.

Instead of waiting, start your day with Jesus - "It doesn't matter what the devil says, today and forever I'm a forgiven child of God with Jesus. It doesn't matter how dark things seem, today and forever I'm living in the light with Jesus. It doesn't matter what the devil promises, today and forever I have something better, a better life - I'm going to heaven with Jesus." So know your enemy - he's beaten by Jesus. Amen.

Hymn - *Christian Worship* 200 / 201

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev'ry need
That has us now o'ertaken.
The old evil foe
Now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.

With might of ours could naught be done;
Soon were our loss effected.
But for us fights the valiant one
Whom God himself elected.
You ask, "Who is this?"
Jesus Christ it is,
The almighty Lord.
And there's no other God;
He holds the field forever.

Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill;
They shall not overpow'r us.
This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none.
He's judged; the deed is done!
One little word can fell him.

The word they still shall let remain,
Nor any thanks have for us;
He's by our side upon the plain
With his good gifts and Spirit.
And do what they will –
Hate, steal, hurt, or kill –
Though all may be gone,
Our victory is won;
The kingdom's ours forever.

Prayer

from *Christian Worship*, pages 134-139

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.
Amen.**

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

A Closing Word

God has chosen us to live in his peace; God has called us to share his peace with others. One of the ways you share his peace with others is through the ministry of St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church. We are able to received your gifts of support through our website and through the mail. God bless you to be a blessing to those around you!

Closing Hymn - *Christian Worship 379*

Amazing grace – how sweet the sound –
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

The Lord has promised good to me;
His Word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.