

Just Checking In

“And [Jesus] said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” (Luke 10:18, ESV)

This month we remember the Reformation of the church which began over 500 years ago. And October 31st is the date chosen as Reformation Day because on this date in AD 1517 Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses. Yet, on this same date our culture celebrates a secular observance which seems to only have grown in popularity over the years – namely, Halloween (the eve of All Hallows’ Day/All Saints’ Day). And Halloween is a day when people dress up in costumes, and ghosts, goblins, and other spooky things are highlighted. Some view it as a day that celebrates evil and ought to be avoided. Others see it as a day that is relatively harmless and is also entertaining (especially for children) - and if anything, a day that mocks evil spirits.

In the *Frequently Asked Questions* section of our church body’s website, this response is given regarding Halloween: *“The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has not officially spoken to the observance of Halloween in any of its resolutions or statements. Frankly, opinions differ in our church regarding the appropriateness of Christians observing Halloween customs. Those who oppose the observance of Halloween by Christians argue that its origins are pagan and that emphasis on the Occult in our society finds expression in various kinds of Halloween symbols, parties and activities. Others argue that, generally speaking, current Halloween customs have little to do with pagan roots in the minds of most, and that there is no harm done in permitting our children to enjoy such customs. In general, this is a good example of an issue where ‘sanctified common sense’ and a balanced approach are necessary — with sensitivity to the ‘witness value’ of a given action or activity in a specific context. On the one hand, we do not want to minimize the potential dangers of involvement with occultic symbols and practices. At the same time, we do not want to lay a burden of conscience on others in matters that lie in the area of Christian freedom and sound Christian judgment”* (www.lcms.org).

This then leads into the topic for October’s newsletter. Last month we “checked in” about the existence of good angels. This month we consider the bad angels. Does the church still believe in the existence of Satan (also known as the devil or the evil one) and demonic activity? The answer is a short and simple “yes.” For to deny that the devil is real is to deny Scripture. Both the Old and New Testaments clearly speak of Satan and describe him as real. Jesus certainly spoke of Satan – as He did in the verse at the beginning of this article. While I’ve never sat down and counted, if I were told that Jesus spoke about the devil more than any other person in the Bible, I would believe it. For Jesus talked about the devil quite a bit.

My friends, to ignore the reality of Satan (which means “adversary”) is very dangerous because he is a very dangerous being. For Satan and all other demons are spiritual beings gone bad – angels created good in the week of creation who afterward sinned against their Creator. How many angels rebelled against God and became demons? Well, the Bible only gives us a fraction – namely, one-third (Revelation 12:4, 7-9). But this doesn’t give us the actual number of demons because we aren’t told how many angels God created. And as we know from Genesis, Satan brought sin into our world by successfully tempting and deceiving mankind’s first mother (and subsequently our first father as well). And the devil (which means “accuser”) and his fellow evil spirits worked against human beings throughout the Bible (including possessing people), and they

continue to oppose us yet today. In fact, the Apostle Peter even tells us that ***“[our] adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”*** (1 Peter 5:8, ESV).

And what makes Satan so extra dangerous is that he is not only deceptive and disingenuous, but he is very insidious and surreptitious as well. The Apostle Paul tells us that ***“Satan disguises himself as an angel of light”*** (2 Corinthians 11:14, ESV). Yet, he desires the darkness of eternal destruction for us. For the devil has no redeemer (Hebrews 2:16) and therefore no hope of salvation – and he desires only to grieve God and hurt you & me as much as possible.

See, the devil is real. If the immense amount of powerfully directed wickedness in this world doesn't convince you that an intelligent, invisible, and personal evil entity exists, then believe what the Bible teaches. And remember, to doubt the existence of the devil is to call Jesus a liar because He has told us that Satan is real. In fact, ***“the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil”*** (1 John 3:8b, ESV). And ***“[God] has delivered us from the power of darkness and has transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins”*** (Colossians 1:13-14, Modern English Version). Therefore, dear Christian ***“you are complete in [Christ], who is the head of all authority and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which also you were raised with Him through the faith of the power of God, who has raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has resurrected together with Him, having forgiven you all sins. He blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us and contrary to us, and He took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross”*** (Colossians 2:10-14, Modern English Version).

Yes indeed, Satan is real and he is dangerous. He will tempt us and work to harm us in this life. But he is bound by the Gospel in this world (Revelation 20:2-3). For our Savior has already defeated the devil and all the demons. He said: ***“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”*** And Jesus protects His Christians from the forces of evil just as He also strengthens and preserves them in His salvation through the Word and Sacraments until the day when they enter the glories of heaven that He has prepared for them. So, while we ought never underestimate Satan, we also need not live in fear of him. Jesus is with us. For ***“as the children share in flesh and blood, He likewise took part in these, so that through death He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were throughout their lives subject to bondage”*** (Hebrews 2:14-15, Modern English Version).

So my fellow Christian, this month and every day of our lives, may you and I rejoice in the Gospel. For we don't belong to the real devil or to any of his real demonic minions. We belong to the real, true, and only Lord and Savior who died and rose for us, and lives for us forevermore.

See you at worship.
Pastor