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Third Sunday in Advent, December 15, 2019

Smith

Children's devotion: Satan wears two hats in the mischief that he does. His other title, "Devil," means 'LIAR.' He lies as he tempts us, coaxing us to turn away from God. But as soon as anyone slips into sin, the devil puts on his other hat: "Satan," you see, means "ACCUSER." As the Satan, the Accuser, he attacks the poor sinner and says: How could you sin against God? The devil is never your friend.

PRAY FOR A FAITH THAT SHINES

6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan[b] also came with them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it." 8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." 12 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

13 One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, 15 and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

16 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" 17 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

18 While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 19 when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship 21 and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." 22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Have you ever wondered what things are like in heaven? Some people think of clouds, or marble pillars, or grassy hills and clear, swift streams of water. Your imagination might include all of your loved ones, or perhaps the “many mansions” Jesus describes in John 14.

The author of Job says nothing at all about the way heaven looks, but he brings us into an actual, historical scene in which the angels are presenting themselves to God in worship, and it happens that this time, the devil, Satan, tags along.

The angels are called “angels” in our translation, but they are “Sons of God” in the Hebrew original. “Sons of God” is also something Moses calls believers, so here it’s a reminder that the usual worshipers in heaven are believers of God--Satan might be there at this moment, but he is an outsider. He is not there to worship. He never uses a title for God; he only addresses God as “you,” as if he’s pretending that they are on an equal footing rather than Creator and creature.

When the devil gets into our lives, he is like a brand new red sock in a load of white laundry. He stains everything—even things he might not touch directly. While the Bible clearly teaches that God created all things, this doesn’t include sin. Sin is rebellion against God, and God didn’t make that. It was the devil who rebelled, and who led others into rebellion. It will help if you remember it this way: **“God is not the author of sin.”**

The devil’s desire is to tempt mankind. We might ask: Why did God allow the devil to tempt Job? Scripture tells us that God uses the evil angels for at least two purposes, like a farmer using an old and rusty shovel for certain jobs around the barn. In 2 Thessalonians, we are told that God allows the devil the demons to punish the godless (2:11-12), but here in Job we see that God also allows the devil to test believers. He also did this with Paul and his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7).

All in one day, a storm broke in on Job’s life. Actually, this may have happened over the course of a few days; we don’t know how far away some of Job’s flocks and herds were grazing and working. Although the servants arrive one after another, some of them may have traveled for more than a day or two. But this is how Job learned about his troubles:

- 1) His **oxen** and **donkeys** were captured and a third of his servants were killed by the Sabeans, a tribe that lived east of the Jordan.
- 2) All of his **sheep** and one third of his servants were killed by the “fire of God,” a terrible rain of brimstone and sulfur from the sky such as that which destroyed Sodom. In fact, it is possible that this was the very same miraculous destruction that wiped out the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, since Job and Abraham lived at about the same time.

- 3) Raiding parties of Chaldeans came out of the north, perhaps using the firestorm to their advantage or to cover their deed, stole Job's large herd of **camels** and killed the last third of Job's servants.
- 4) Finally, Job learned that a fierce wind had come across the desert—this, too, may have been connected with the terrible firestorm that burned all of Job's sheep—and knocked down the house of Job's eldest son, who was hosting a gathering of all the rest of Job's **children**. They all died.

This meant that he lost his ability to plow, plant, and harvest, since the oxen were gone. He lost his family's local transportation, since the donkeys were gone. He lost his supply of food and cloth for clothing and warmth, since the sheep were gone. He lost his fleet of camels as well, which had enabled him to trade and transport very heavy loads and to transport goods from vastly distant places. He lost almost all of his servants, and worst of all, he lost all ten of his children.

But we don't always know in our lives, whether we are being tested specifically in our faith, or whether some tragedy strikes simply because there is sin in the world. If someone loses their temper with you and says or does something unfortunate, that might be more about their bad day than anything good, bad, or neutral that you did or said. It might be more a time just to forgive and forget than to explore "why."

The one thing Job did not lose was his faith, although the devil predicted he would lose his faith. Instead, Job confessed one of the Bible's great creeds of faith and devotion to God: "**Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.**"

Job knows that he came into the world with nothing, and he will leave the world with nothing. It is God's privilege and choice to give us anything at all. And if the Lord should give something, it is to his glory and to our good. And if he takes something away, it is also to his glory and for the good of his Kingdom, even if we are pained by it, as Job certainly was by the loss of his dear children.

But God's compassion covers more than our lives and the temporary things we have here on earth, even our relationships with the people in our lives. Consider God's love. The way that God communicates himself to another being—and all other beings are his creation—is not for God's sake, but in order to benefit that other being. So there are three circles of God's love:

1. All creatures are loved and cared for by God, as Jesus says when he tells us that even a sparrow cannot fall without God knowing it.

2. Second, all human beings are loved by God, and this is where God's law is set up as a barrier to help all mankind know right from wrong, and to be protected from danger and from sins.
3. But third, God specifically and most dearly loves believers, Christians. That's you and me.^a

God's love shines on us more clearly and purely in Jesus, who rushed down into the world to be paid in a manger, to get right into the muck and the filth of our lives, like the reality of the contents of every stable and barn, **to lift mankind up** from the filth of our sins, the **rescue** us, and **to forgive us**, so that we would be able to bear the burdens of human life.

God's love shines on us so much that we must understand that even the holy angels are not so much the object of God's love **as are the believing sinners** who are justified and saved by Jesus Christ. The angels are God's servants to this end: That we would come to faith, that we would serve God in ways that please him (which is only possible for believers to do), and that we would then in turn be his servants and tools for his service in the world to pass along our faith and to do good for the good of the Church.

So when we bear crosses--the crosses of disease, loss, grief, ruin in our lives and pain in our hearts, we bless and glorify God. We rely on his forgiveness which makes us right with God. We trust that he will care for us even when we don't understand where he is taking us in life. And we find ways to serve him with whatever we have:

- Our hands (in work or in prayer),
- our temporary treasure,
- our family as a workforce for Christ and his glory,
- and, after all else seems to be removed and there is nothing left but breath, let your faith still shine and your prayers still rise--all for the love of Christ, who loves you, and to build up the faith of the people around you.

The devil is never your friend, but God is never ever your enemy. Trust in God, put your faith in Jesus Christ, and be strengthened by the Holy Ghost who lives in you always. However the devil wants to stain your life, pray for a faith that shines. And the peace of God... Amen.

^a See Hoenecke *Ev. Lutheran Dogmatics* Vol. II p. 145 ff.: The Transitive Love of God.