

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Last week, we heard how the man Jesus, God's Son, did battle with "the old evil foe" (LSB656) as He began His ministry for us. Jesus defeated this foe, and the devil "*departed from him until an opportune time*" (Luke 4:13). But that foe is not the only foe that Jesus would face, nor is the devil mankind's only foe. Twice in the explanations of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer Luther identifies mankind's enemies: not just the devil, but also the world and our own sinful nature. Thus, when we pray, "And lead us not into temptation," we're asking "that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice" (Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, 6<sup>th</sup> Petition).

Thus, although the devil crawled away with his tail between his legs, other foes took up the fight. Specifically in our Gospel, it was the Pharisees in the world.

Now, at first glance, you might think that the Pharisees actually had Jesus' best interest at heart, after all they warned Him about Herod; "*Herod wants to kill you,*" they told Him. Wasn't that nice. The problem is that there is no indication that Herod wanted to put Jesus to death. He did want to see Him because of the miracles Jesus was doing (Luke 23:8). He wondered "maybe Jesus is John the Baptist come back from the dead" (Mark 6:14). And later, Herod would have the opportunity to kill Jesus on that Friday when Jesus suffered for the sins of the world, but he didn't do it. He questioned Jesus, mocked Him, and treated Him with contempt; but then Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate alive.

So the Pharisees were actually trying to trick Jesus. They were trying to get Jesus off message and to deflect Him from His purpose. They wanted Him to stop His preaching, stop His miracles, and especially to stop "showing them up."

But Jesus avoids their trap and tells them that He would not be outfoxed. He would not be distracted from His mission. Rather He says He would continue to do what He came to do "*today and tomorrow.*" And then He would "*finish [His] course,*" on "*the third day.*" Of course, "*the third day*" makes us Christians think of Easter here, but that's likely not what Jesus is referring to. Rather, three is a Godly number; it's likely a number meant to refer to God; and so, "*the third day*" is likely referring to God's time, the fullness of time when all would be accomplished on a cross. And you know what Jesus said from the cross as He breathed His last. τετέλεσται—"*It is finished*" (John 19:30). It's related to the verb used in our text and translated: "*finish my course.*"

Moreover, this all had to take place in Jerusalem, for "*it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.*" Therefore, it was necessary (δεῖ) for Him to go today and tomorrow and the next day to Jerusalem, that He might

accomplish His mission, being killed, like the prophets before Him. For there would Jesus accomplish all that He came to do for the world. There would He, the *"founder of [our] salvation"* be made *"perfect through suffering"* (Heb. 2:10). There, would He, *"being made perfect,"* become *"the source of eternal salvation to all who obey to Him"* (Heb. 5:9), who hear His voice and follow after Him.

There in Jerusalem on the third day, would He reach His goal, not just vicarious death, but victorious resurrection and the salvation of the world. There, in Jerusalem, would He do it of His own accord. There He would lay down His life for us and take it back up again in victory.

Of course, Jesus knew that these Pharisees were against Him. He had already warned His disciples: *"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy"* (Luke 12:1). Moreover, they were teaching a doctrine of salvation by the unattainable keeping the Law of Moses. Jesus, on the other hand, was pointing the people to Himself as the narrow door of salvation. The Law is useful, to be sure, for *"through the law comes knowledge of sin"* (Rom. 3:20). But the Law does not justify. *"For if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose"* (Gal. 2:21). The Law does not save. *"By grace are you saved, though faith [in Christ Jesus]...it's the gift of God, not according to works"* (Eph. 2:8-9). Jesus saves ... He who said, *"I am the door."* *"Whoever enters by me will be saved"* (John 10:9).

For Jesus not only has accomplished our salvation, but He also desires to gather us unto Himself. Jesus expresses this truth in words of such longing and with such picturesque language, not this time of the familiar figure of a shepherd and sheep, but of a bird and her chicks. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..."* This picture of the Lord is found also in the Psalms where the Lord is described as a bird that *"covers [us] with his pinions,"* and we as the chicks find refuge *"under his wing"* (Ps. 91:4).

He gathers us "when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity." Again, His will for us "is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die" (Small Catechism, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Petitions).

For although we don't have to face the Pharisees as Jesus did, there are modern day Pharisees who are opposed to Christ and to His Church. They attack the Church around the world and with impunity. As Christians we deplore the Australian man who entered the mosque in New Zealand and shot those innocent Muslims, but this man has been caught, and he will stand trial for his heinous act. But where is the wall-to-wall coverage of the churches bombed in Egypt and elsewhere, killing Christians at

a similar rate? Where is the national outrage over those heinous acts? Where are the reports of those perpetrators being brought to justice? The collective yawn by the media elites is distressing. Where is the sympathetic coverage of attacks on Christians in the US? You know about Jack Phillips of Masterpiece Cakeshop only because of the modern outrage at his supposed “hate” of LGBT people.

Or did you hear of the recent 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals ruling on the ministerial tax exemption for housing? What? You didn't know about that? No reporting on that? Yes the “Freedom From Religion Foundation [claimed] that a longstanding tax code exemption for religious housing ... violates the Establishment Clause” of our constitution, and they did so knowing that removal of such an exemption meant the closure of many congregations around the country—their real purpose. Thanks be to God. The 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit ruled that “Providing a tax exemption does not ‘connote[] sponsorship, financial support, and active involvement of the [government] in religious activity’” (Gaylor v. Mnuchin, p. 23). A small reprieve.

But the fact is, we encounter daily people with an animus against Christians beyond compare. At a recent Shepherds United meeting I sat by Bill Weinrich, and during the talk highlighting some of our modern challenges, I leaned over to him and said, “This is why we need to know our early Church history.” For you'll remember that the Church was not favored in Rome, and was even illicit at times. But his response surprised me. “This is more decadent than Rome,” he said. And certainly the times have changed in our lifetime. When I was growing up, it wasn't this way. But today, we truly are challenged by those in the world who “*walk as enemies of the cross of Christ ... [whose] end is destruction, [whose] god is their belly, and [who] glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*”

Freedom from religion? That's laughable. Theirs is a hedonistic religion, for as Luther reminds us, “whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god” (Large Catechism, Part I:3), and they want to impose it upon us Christians. Thus we truly are in a battle; we are a Church Militant now. “*But,*” as St. Paul reminds us as we do battle against our foe, the world, “*our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*” who has won the victory over all our enemies, and who will one day take us from this raging battle into the glory of the Church Triumphant, transforming “*our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*”

And he encourages us: “*stand firm thus in the Lord,*” which is why we are here today: to be built up by Christ's word and by His precious Body and Blood, that in the midst of a world arrayed against us, we may go on today and tomorrow and the next day in the protection of His wings until we have finished our course in faith and rest from our labors. God grant us steadfastness in this faith.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.