

THE DEVIL IS ON THE PROWL
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Demons. Satan. The Devil. Evil spirits. What a lesson for a summer morning!

Remember, though, 1 Peter says that the devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. [1 Peter 5:8]

In other parts of scripture, Jesus, Paul, and James all take for granted that Satan works through people, that, evil and unclean spirits and demons actually possess people and make them do some pretty bad stuff.

Earlier in Luke, the devil tempts Jesus.

Specifically, the devil takes Jesus to a high place to show him ALL the kingdoms of the world.

How high? I've been at 39,000 feet (Mt. Everest is only 29,000)

and you can't see all the kingdoms from there.

The devil would have had to take him to, well, heaven, to see ALL of them.

The devil's claim was that these domains had been entrusted to him,

and he can give them and their glory to anyone he wanted to;

he'll give them to Jesus if Jesus will worship him.

NOTE that Jesus doesn't argue with the devil's claim about owning the earth;

Jesus simply says he's going to worship only God.

Then Jesus sets out to do his ministry in a world owned by the devil.

I did a quick survey in the gospels and here's what Satan, demons, devils, as well as unclean and evil spirits do when they possess people:

- They make them scream, shriek and shout.
- They render people deaf and mute
- They slam their person on the ground.
- They make them foam at the mouth.
- They throw their person into the fire, or into water, trying to kill them
- They bring all kinds of diseases and disabilities to them, including being stiff, bent over, and crippled.
- They cause people to be isolated, naked and homeless.
- They torture them and won't leave them alone.
- They caused Judas to betray Jesus, and Peter to deny him. Three times.

Now, we modern, scientific people are way too sophisticated to believe in demons, unclean and evil spirits, or Satan. Right?

Because nothing like any of that is happening now. Right?

I've been a priest for nearly 20 years. I've been preaching longer than that.

(They make us practice a bit before setting us loose on you.)

At my seminary, they cautioned us to tell God's truth, but not to get immersed in partisan politics, because no political party has a corner on God's truth.

I will endeavor to keep heeding that warning.

As I've often said, at Good Shepherd, my working assumption is that

40% of you voted Republican, 40% voted Democrat,

and 20% didn't do either because you were too young or are Canadian.

I, however, am the pastor for 100% of you.

I will not get into partisan politics, but if I speak God's truth it may. . . no, it SHOULD have an impact on how we chose to be governed, how we choose to spend our resources, how we choose to develop our economic systems, and the values we choose to enshrine in our laws, which is what politics are all about.

Some systems are devilish and devour people.

In a country with more Christians than any other country on the planet

Christians should work to change those devilish systems.

Especially in rural parts of our country, systems isolate poor pregnant women from prenatal care.

Shouldn't the followers of Jesus cast the demon of sickness out

and put in a system that ensures the health of EVERY mother and child?

So very many poor families are homeless, even ones who work.

Why? in Pinellas County¹, two minimum-wage parents would have to work 50 hours a week EACH to afford a 2-bedroom apartment.

A SINGLE minimum-wage parent will have to work about 80 hours a week to afford a studio or 1-bedroom apartment.

Shouldn't the followers of Jesus cast out the demons of economic oppression

and put in a system that enables all families live in safety, just as we want to live?

Children, little, tiny children, who have no voice and no choice

are being horribly neglected in detention camps.

Shouldn't the followers of Jesus cast that demon of muteness out

and be the voices for the most vulnerable among us?

What happens when the followers of Jesus cast demons out?

Jesus says that when Satan falls, when demons are sent packing,

when evil spirits leave, healing happens; the torture stops, the Kingdom of God has come near.

What's the Kingdom of God about? Yes, it's about joy, healing, and peace;

it's about faith, hope, and love. All of these can be summed up with this:

The Kingdom of God is about JUSTICE: Justice is when all creation is healed,

when all people, places, creatures and lives are as God created us to be

without the devastation caused by human selfishness.

I want to tell you about someone I met in Birmingham, Alabama in 2009 –

10 years ago, almost to the day.

R.G. Lyons grew up in a comfortable, middle-class home in rural Alabama.

He went to church, played sports, and described himself

as a typical 30-something, privileged, white man.

R.G. became a Methodist pastor. When I met him, he lived and worked

in the very poorest part of Birmingham, the West End.

He did not lock his house. Why not? so people could come in to use the washer and dryer,

or get something to eat, or just to get out of the heat, or cold, or rain.

He invited me to his house: it had the basic furniture and appliances, but no TV,

no electronic gadgets; just lots of chairs for visitors, Bibles for worshippers,

and pictures for inspiration.

I spent several days following R.G. around as he did his pastor thing.

One morning, R.G. and I went to the courthouse

where R.G. was going to testify in a family court hearing.

An older, wealthy suburban white couple whose kids were all grown

had been all ready to retire and play golf and do all that stuff.

However, instead they had decided to become the long-term foster parents of a special-needs African American boy.

¹ <https://reports.nlihc.org/oor/florida>

The boy's mother gratefully supported this move; she was sick and disabled, a double leg amputee.

The family court required character references for all foster parents, and this couple had asked R.G. to be their reference.

"Do they belong to your church on the West End?" I asked.

"Oh, no.," he said, "They live in the suburbs. I met them at a fundraiser supporting the special school this boy attends."

"Then how did they get this idea to care for this boy?" I asked.

R.G. just shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "I asked them to."

"And what did you say to that couple that would make them even consider such a huge commitment?"

He said, "I told them they could be the answer to a boy's prayer that the justice of God happen in his life today, on earth as in heaven. They prayed about it, and said 'yes.' "

I said, "R.G., I work hard as a pastor, I try to do the right thing.

I'm involved in all kinds of projects and ministries, I give what I can to others, and I tell my people they should do the same kind of stuff. But all this is way beyond what I do."

That's when R.G. said something that I still chew on every single day:

"The most difficult change in the human heart isn't moving from selfishness to charity, but from charity to justice."

That day, when a new family was formed, justice happened, and God's Kingdom was near.

Another day, R.G. took me to a gorgeous organic garden

right in the middle of the poorest neighborhood I think I've ever been in the U.S.

His inner-city church had taken a weed-infested city lot and transformed it into an amazing certified organic community garden.

Almost all the work is done by members of his congregation and the garden's neighbors.

Produce from the garden stocks a food pantry and gives folks in the neighborhood – not just parishioners – a place to grow fresh, wholesome food for their own homes.

Being certified organic, they can also sell the produce to local restaurants, using the funds to sustain and expand the garden.

All these people had moved from the selfishness of relying on charity to feed them, to the empowerment of feeding themselves, sharing with others, becoming self-sufficient through their sales of produce from their garden.

As we all know, God has a special place in his heart for gardens.

In the dignity of hard work, a blighted patch of the earth was healed, justice happened, and God's Kingdom was definitely near.

In a world still where the devil still prowls, roars and devours,

where demons still possess, torture and sicken humanity,

the church is the people gathered to support each other as we each make journey from selfishness to charity, and then from charity to justice.

This is a journey that Jesus sends us out on, as lambs among wolves.

But we are not lambs without resources!

We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we are never alone.

Nothing will harm us – it may kill us, but will not harm us –

because, in Christ, our names are written in heaven.

When, because of our faith in Jesus Christ, when we strive for the justice by bringing peace and healing, we actually become manifestations of the divine, Christ's body, once again active in the world – and in this way we bring the God's Kingdom near.

Concretely, what can you do about the systems that need to be changed?

First, remember Ubuntu, the word I shared with you a month ago from the Bantu language in South Africa, that means “we’re all in this together,” or “I am as I am because of who you are,” or “we’re all together for the common good.” As Desmond Tutu described it:
*A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole.*²

What does *ubuntu* look like in action?

I think I’ve mentioned Lisa Baker before; she’s a parishioner here, and a medical doctor who runs a program called *Straw to Bread* [S2B].

They call her “Mama Lisa.”

She just returned from a mission to Kenya.

In this mission and the others before it, the S2B folks find out from the villagers what they need, and work to get it to them.

My favorite story is where the villagers asked for rain barrels for their homes to store water from the rainy season to use in the dry season.

Straw to Bread got the rain barrels, lots of them, but not nearly enough for every house.

The villagers met to decide who would get them.

To Mama Lisa’s surprise, the barrels didn’t go the VIPs, but to the poor who needed them the most.

Another surprise was that some houses made the water in their barrels last the whole dry season, but others emptied it in a month.

With the idea of teaching them how not to waste water, the S2B team visited the high-use households and found that they used more water not because they were wasting it,

but because they were sharing with their neighbors with no barrels.

That’s *ubuntu*.

With that in mind: the second thing you can do is look at the world with the eyes of your heart, with God’s eyes, and identify a demon that is embedded in a system that you, personally, have the capacity to help change. I have taken some personal steps; the first is to decry the systematic abuse of children in the border camps.

How many of you know what a “Mandatory Reporter” is?

Mandatory Reporters are professionals, such as teachers, nurses and doctors, police, social workers, clergy – who have a mandatory duty to report suspected cases of child abuse or child neglect; if we DON’T report, we are breaking the law.

Along with thousands of others clergy and other Mandatory Reporters,

I have signed a letter (as Becky) reporting the abuse and neglect of children being held in the border detention camps, just as I would have to do

if I suspected any of the children here were in being treated in that way.

I have also personally financially supported a assisted a Roman Catholic nun, a friend of mine, whose community is ministering to the children, holding them, giving them supplies and other care.

I know the money is being used wonderfully.

² <http://www.tutufoundationusa.org/desmond-tutu-peace-foundation/>

So, what can you do? For each of the myriad decisions you make during a day,
whenever you make a choice to do X . . . ask yourself, day by day, choice by choice:
will I be bringing hell to other people, or will I be bringing God's Kingdom near to them?

Or, much more simply put, What Would Jesus Do?

As you consider your response, remember: Jesus said
that in serving the least the last, the lost and the lonely, we are serving him.

SERMON HYMN: *Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service*

COLLECT OF THE DAY

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, you are the city that shelters us, the mother who comforts us. With your Spirit accompany us on our life's journey, that we may spread your peace in all the world, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

NUMBERS 11:14–17, 24–25 • LUKE 10:1–11, 16–20

Moses said to the Lord,] "I can't bear this people on my own. They're too heavy for me. If you're going to treat me like this, please kill me. If I've found favor in your eyes, then don't let me endure this wretched situation."

The Lord said to Moses, "Gather before me seventy men from Israel's elders, whom you know as elders and officers of the people. Take them to the meeting tent, and let them stand there with you. Then I'll descend and speak with you there. I'll take some of the spirit that is on you and place it on them. Then they will carry the burden of the people with you so that you won't bear it alone.

So Moses went out and told the people the Lord's words. He assembled seventy men from the people's elders and placed them around the tent. The Lord descended in a cloud, spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and placed it on the seventy elders. When the spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but only this once.

PSALM 66:1-8

Be joyful in God, all you lands; sing the glory of his Name; sing the glory of his praise.

Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!

because of your great strength your enemies cringe before you.

All the earth bows down before you, sings to you, sings out your Name."

Come now and see the works of God, how wonderful he is in his doing toward all people.

He turned the sea into dry land, so that they went through the water on foot, and there we rejoiced in him.

In his might he rules for ever; his eyes keep watch over the nations; let no rebel rise up against him.

Bless our God, you peoples; make the voice of his praise to be heard;

Who holds our souls in life, and will not allow our feet to slip.

EPHESIANS 1:15–23

Since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, this is the reason that I don't stop giving thanks to God for you when I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation that makes God known to you. I pray that the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God's call, what is the richness of God's glorious inheritance among believers, and what is the overwhelming greatness of God's power that is working among us believers. This power is conferred by the energy of God's powerful strength. God's power was at work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and sat him at God's right side in the heavens, far above every ruler and authority and power and angelic power, any power that might be named not only now but in the future. God put everything under Christ's feet and made him head of everything in the church, which is his body. His body, the church, is the fullness of Christ, who fills everything in every way.

LUKE 10:1–11, 16–20

After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. He said to them, “The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest. Go! Be warned, though, that I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves. Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don’t even greet anyone along the way. Whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘May peace be on this house.’ If anyone there shares God’s peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don’t move from house to house. Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘God’s kingdom has come upon you.’ Whenever you enter a city and the people don’t welcome you, go out into the streets and say, ‘As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God’s kingdom has come to you.’

Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. Whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

The seventy-two returned joyously, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit themselves to us in your name.” Jesus replied, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Look, I have given you authority to crush snakes and scorpions underfoot. I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you. Nevertheless, don’t rejoice because the spirits submit to you. Rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.”

BLESSING: Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you unconditionally. Go in peace to follow the Way of Jesus, and as you journey, the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you now and always.