

Revelation 12.7-12

The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels [transf.]

“A War of Words”

24 September 2017

St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The sermon is based on the Epistle, Revelation chapter 12, and especially these words: “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.” *Oremus: haec, pater sancte, verba tua sunt, etc.*

For those of you who had the patience to sit through our Revelation class last year at Sound Words Academy, you already know that the Revelation given to St. John isn’t as scary as it seems.

Why? Because we’re living it. Right now. It’s not about some date out there in the future. It’s about the time from Jesus’ Ascension to the right hand of God until He returns again. It’s about the time we live in *right now*.

Or maybe that just makes our times all the more scary. Because the cosmic battles, the warfare in heaven and on earth, that the Revelation spells out in so much symbolic detail—it’s all happening right now.

Right now is when Satan prowls the earth. That fallen angel. With all his host of fallen angels. As St. Peter says, “Beware, your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring seeking whom he may devour.”

Right now is when signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth are happening—the earthquakes and the hurricanes and floods and destruction—, calling the crown of God’s creation to repentance from sin and faith in the only Redeemer from sin, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God whose blood alone overcomes.

Right now is when the saints cry out from under the altar of incense in heaven, “How long, O Lord, how long?”

And today we are transported with John in his vision to a cardinal moment in that history of now. To a moment where the history of everything changes.

There’s another moment like this one. Another moment that changes everything. It happened on earth. It’s the hinge of history. The cardinal point. The thing without which history and existence cannot be understand. The thing that all history led up to. And the thing from which all history flows.

You already know what it is. It’s the death of the Lord Jesus, who was “handed over on account of our transgressions and raised again on account of our justification.” (Rom 4.25) It’s the moment when the crucified Son of God hung upon His holy Cross and cried out one simple word: τετέλεσται [*tetélestai*]. It is finished.

In that one word the Lord Jesus summarized the whole cardinal event. For it was finished. He *had* lived a life of perfect obedience to the will of His Father. He had suffered the torment of hell itself on the holy Cross.

Can you imagine? An eternity of torment compounded by all the sinners in the world leveled against God's Son, focused on Him like light through a magnifying glass. In three long hours. And at that point it *was* finished. The sins of the world paid. In full. The life required by God's holy Law lived. To perfection. He was handed over on account of our transgressions. That's why He suffered on the holy Cross. And because He had done it, the Lord gave Him the name above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee of those in heaven and of those on earth and of those under the earth should bow and proclaim that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Lord over sin. Lord over death. Lord over hell. And He was raised again in glory as the first proclamation of that fact to the unbelieving world.

That's what your entire faith hangs on: Jesus did all this. And He did it for you. Jesus did all this. And He removed from you the burden of every last sin. Jesus did all this. And He opened to you the way of everlasting life. And made it all yours in your Baptism. Praise be to God!

But that cardinal point on earth has companion point in heaven.

Just as there was warfare on earth—the serpent bruising the heel of Jesus in His crucifixion. Jesus crushing the serpent's head in His death. Just as there was warfare on earth, so also was there warfare in heaven.

And it was a war of words.

Here on earth it was fought in flesh and blood. In *your* flesh and blood. In the flesh and blood the Son of God took upon Himself. There it was fought with courtroom speeches. And the prosecution team, the DA, was none other than Satan Himself. The great deceiver. As if the detective who entrapped you in a crime not only arrested, charged, and arraigned you, but also appeared behind the prosecution's bench to make sure the charge stuck; that you were found guilty. And then stayed for the sentencing to make good and sure you got what you had coming to you.

Thing is, he had a point. As Isaiah says, "There is none righteous. No. Not even one." When he says that he's not talking about the heathen. He's talking about God's chosen people. There's no escaping it. In one fell moment, the entire race, created in God's own image, didn't think that was good enough. The entrapment? The deception? Eat this, and you'll be like God. What a tragedy! How unlike God they became. He deathless, they now mortal. He holy, they now sinful. He good, they now wicked to the core. And they passed this infection on, like a mom with HIV to the baby in her womb, to every one of their descendants. To you. To me. So that just like you can't help getting infection after infection when you have HIV, you can't help succumbing to temptation after temptation when you have this inherited sin. You can't. And if you think you can, you don't need to stay any longer. Because what I have to say doesn't pertain to you.

That's exactly what Satan pointed to. And he was right.

Now look, to Satan, you're just a pawn in this game. He doesn't care so very much for you or about you. It's not like he's looking for company in hell. What he *is* looking for is every way to ruin the work and plan of the good and gracious God. His only desire ever to make not good what God at the first creation had declared "very good." To bring hurricanes in place of gentle rains. To bring earthquakes to the ground the Lord had made firm. To make the crown of God's creation, you, into some throw-away piece

of garbage destined not for the joy of heaven but for the burning pile of hell. To make life into rotting death. He had gamed the system. God's holiness brooks no sin. And so of Sts. Adam and Eve he made sinners. And of every one of their infected descendants. And standing behind the prosecution's bench he made good and certain that the Lord God knew it. He leveled the accusation.

But remember: the cardinal point in the history of the world has a cardinal point in heaven, as well. And at the moment of his head-crushing on earth, Satan was cast out of heaven. No more accusations can be brought. Adam and Eve and all their descendants no longer being prosecuted. The war of words won by the eviction of the prosecution from the courtroom. The court case thrown out as already settled by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. St. Michael and his angels victorious.

The problem is, the war of words continues. For Satan has not been cast into hell yet. He has been cast down to earth. And just he continues to deceive, so does he continue to accuse.

But listen to this. His accusation against you is no longer directed to the throne of the heavenly Father. It's directed at you. And this is his great deception. He would have you believe that your great sin, your great sinfulness, the body of sin and death that you cannot escape, try as you may, still places you not in God's kingdom, but his.

Isn't that how you feel? True confessions: there are days when living with this body of sin I feel as though I shouldn't even crawl my way into this pulpit. What right have I? Who do I think I am?

If you feel anything like that, then you know how this war of words continues on earth.

But Satan has been cast down. His accusation no longer applies. You have conquered by the blood of the Lamb. And in virtue of that blood and of that death and of that perfect sacrificial Lamb of God, God sends forth other words throughout the world: Your sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ. And every time those words are spoken, Satan is cast down once again. And no less powerfully than the first time. For St. Michael and the holy angels attend every such announcement. And the boisterous prosecutor is removed from the courtroom.

Isn't that what happened at the very birth of Jesus? Who was there, but St. Michael and the multitude of the heavenly host? With words, no less! "Peace on earth and goodwill to men." I.e., "Your sins are forgiven you!"

Isn't that what happened at Jesus' resurrection? Who was there but the two angels? And wasn't their message, "He is risen"? Which is just another way of saying "He was handed on account of our transgressions and raised again on account of our *justification*"? I.e., "Your sins are forgiven you!"

And isn't that what happens every time we celebrate the Sacrament? Isn't that what we sing: "Therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name"? St. Michael and the holy angels here not just because of some aesthetic nicety. But because Christ here gives His body *for the forgiveness of sins*; and His blood *for their remission*. They are the angels rejoicing over every repentant sinner finding in that sure Word of God their release from all sins. And the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, cast down.

So that in the great war of words only one word remains. God's. Your sins are forgiven you for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

*pax dei, etc.*

jsb

*sdg*