

July 20, 2008
Pentecost 10

"Satan Among the Angels"

JOB 2:1

J On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. ² And the LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." ³ 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. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." ⁴ "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. ⁵ But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face." ⁶ The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life." ⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. ⁸ Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. ⁹ His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" ¹⁰ He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. ¹¹ When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. ¹² When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. ¹³ Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

Look around you this morning and notice that you are worshiping with a very special group of people. You are worshiping with saints of God washed in the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the world's sin. You are also worshiping with angels, even though you cannot see them. Jesus said that there is joy among the angels over one sinner that repents. How many angels are with us right now, in this very special place?

We like to think that evil spirits cannot be present with us if God's angels are with us and watching over us. That is not the case, however. Satan and his evil spirits will dog you every step in life, even as you are surrounded by angels that protect and keep you, even as you worship today. Only on judgment day will they finally be cast down into the lake of fire forever.

Today we watch in horror as Satan seeks permission from the Lord to afflict Job with even more pain and suffering. We are bothered by this at first until we realize that the Lord is always in control. He will patiently strengthen Job through this trial and suffering. He will lead him to proclaim triumphantly, "I know that my Redeemer lives!" As Martin Luther wrote in his magnificent hymn: *Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us.*

This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done! One little word can fell him.

Satan severely afflicts Job

Oh, look again if you can, at how severely Satan afflicts Job. We are told that Satan was right there with angels who presented themselves before the Lord. "On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him." Here we get a glimpse into how angels stand before God the way soldiers might stand before their commanding officer. What bothers us at first is how brazen Satan is to stand right there among God's angels, eager to afflict people even as God sends his angels to protect them. He told the Lord he came "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." The book of Ephesians does not exaggerate when it says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

The Lord God is proud of his servant Job. He says 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. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." Job was God's man, molded and shaped by the hand of the Lord to be what he was, just as the Lord has molded and shaped your life to be what it is this morning. In the eyes of the community he looked blameless and pure. He feared God and shunned evil. He even maintained his integrity even though he lost all his wealth and even his ten children he dearly loved. The word for integrity has the thought of astonishment or amazement. Job was able to confess an awesome God even in life's darkest hour. He was given the strength from the Lord to patiently say, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised!" Have you ever visited someone who was sick or dying and they gave such glory and praise to God that it brought tears to your eyes? That's the God of Job and very same God who has redeemed you and called you by name.

The devil falls right into God's trap as he taunts and ridicules Job: "Skin for skin! A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, he will surely curse you to your face." Revelation 12 says that Satan accuses us before God's throne day and night. If that is true, then I wonder what awful things the devil accused us of this past day in the presence of God. "Look at Steve Degner. See how richly you have blessed him. Take some of these blessings away from him and see if he does not curse you to your face." The Lord knew exactly what he was going to do with Job. He knew how he would strengthen him, even if the devil afflicted him severely in his physical body. From the deepest darkest depths of pain and suffering Christians have sung their hymns of praise to God: "Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side; Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain; Leave to your God to order and provide."

The pain the Lord allowed Satan to afflict on Job takes our breath away. "So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes." Imagine being in such pain from sores that you find comfort and release by scraping yourself with a piece of broken pottery such as this. Have

you ever had a bad rash, eczema, poison oak, shingles, or chicken pox? There were no lotions, no calamine creams, no Cortisone, no pain medication, nothing to relieve the pain except rubbing your skin with a piece of broken pottery. He was covered with sores from the top of his head to the soles of his feet.

Where is God in all this? Why did he allow the devil to afflict Job to such a high level? Where was God when the planes flew into the twin towers on September 11? Where is God when hundreds of thousands of people live in fear from Jinjaweed Arab marauders in the Sudan region of Africa? Why does God still allow Satan to motivate more people to strap bombs on their bodies and walk into a crowded marketplace to kill as many people as possible? The Lord tells us exactly where he is and who is in control in Psalm 46. "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress." The God who strengthened Job for his darkest hours of life is the same God who will strengthen us, even as Satan walks among God's angels and does his dirty work.

Satan subtly tempts Job

Satan delighted in every moment of pain that Job endured. But he wanted more. He wanted Job to curse God to his face. He even uses Job's own wife to get to him and tempt him. She said, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" When someone hurts someone you love, everything inside of you wants to lash out and hurt that person. The famous basketball player LeBron James was embarrassed a few months ago when his mother stepped on the court and tore into the referee for not calling enough fouls on her son. Mrs. Job would like nothing better than to step into the court of God's justice and let the Lord God know things have gone too far and her husband needs relief. She even encourages Job to curse God and die, rather than experience more suffering and pain.

It is scary to think of how Satan can use two people who are close to each in marriage to lead them further away from God rather than closer to God. I recall knowing a professor at UCSB who was so close to his little boy. They did everything together. One day the little fellow wandered off while visiting his dad at work, and drowned in the lagoon at UCSB. In less than a year the marriage disintegrated. Rather than support each other in hard times, the man and wife allowed their anger and pain to break up their relationship with each other. The same thing happens with the Lord. People lose their integrity, their sense of awe and wonder when it comes to how great the Lord is. This happens in bad times. It can also happen in good times. That is why Paul had this amazing prayer for the Christians in Ephesus 3: "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

How does Job handle his wife who is being used by Satan to tempt him to lash out in anger against the Lord? He says to her, "You are talking like a foolish woman." There comes a time in every good marriage when a husband needs to tell his wife, "Now you are talking like a foolish woman." There comes a time in every good marriage when a wife needs to tell her husband, "Now you are talking like a foolish man." If your beloved husband or your

beloved wife says or does anything to discredit the Lord and make his name less holy, then its time to say, "Now you are talking foolish." During one of Martin Luther's down times, his beloved wife Katie put on mourning clothes. When he saw the mourning clothes, he asked her in shock, "Who died?" She responded, "Since you are acting as if Jesus died and didn't rise again, I thought I would wear these mourning clothes."

How many times in one week do we not need to confess our sin to the Lord by simply saying, "Lord I have been a foolish man!" "Lord I have been a foolish woman!" I have not given you the glory you deserve. I have prayed the Lord's Prayer with its words, "Hallowed be Thy name." I have not kept my integrity, my sense of awe and wonder at what a great God you are and how much you have blessed me. This morning we take our foolishness to the cross and see the blood of Jesus pouring out just for us. We take his body and his blood to strengthen us just as the Lord strengthened Job.

Job was able to weather the temptation. He even survived when his friends came and sat down with him saying nothing for seven days. Imagine having friends who say nothing but their silence is deafening. They say nothing, but you know what they are thinking by their silence. They are wondering how they can approach Job with the question, "Job, what terrible sin did you commit to deserve all this?" Job survived because the Lord patiently gave him the strength to say, "Shall we not accept good from God and not trouble?" We are told, "In all of this, Job did not sin in what he said." He kept his integrity, his awe and wonder of God. He sent the devil packing. Satan enjoyed strutting around among the angels, and even taunting God about his servant Job. Job was victorious because he had an awesome God who gave him strength. With Luther we can say, "This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done! One little word can fell him." Amen.