

Last Sunday of the Church Year November 20, 2022

EVIL ONLY SEEMS TO BE WINNING!

Revelation 19:11-16

Scripture Readings

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Matthew 25:31-46

Hymns

14, 604, 341, 51

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941) unless otherwise noted

+ In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen. +

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (NIV)

As a child, I liked a movie where you could easily tell the good guys from the bad guys, and where the good guys always won. I still like movies like that. Give me a good John Wayne or Jimmy Stewart movie over what's out there today. When we're young it all seems so simple: in the end the good guys win.

But after we've lived in this sin-fallen world a few decades or so, we find it doesn't always work that way. In fact, as we grow older, we find that evil appears to come out on top more often than not. In these latter days, the triumphs of evil seem more prevalent than ever. It wasn't really that long ago when things like abortion, fathers abandoning their children, divorce for any reason, shacking up, open homosexuality, were much more the exception rather than the norm, as they are today.

And, although the Church has always been attacked by false teachers, more and more church-goers today are choosing style over substance, emotion over truth, and entertainment over solid Scriptural instruction.

As disciples of Christ, all of this can be very troubling to us. Questions arise such as: How can a Holy God permit so much blatant evil in the world? Why does the LORD allow the world to be flooded by thousands of smooth talking false prophets, leading countless millions down the broad path to hell? Or, as many a Sunday School student has asked, "*Why doesn't God just kill Satan and be done with it?*"

Today's text from Revelation helps us deal with these questions. It allows us to see an astonishing and glorious vision of that Holy Warrior, the Great Enemy of all that is Evil, Jesus Christ. With this eye-opening vision, God's Word gives us the needed encouragement that **EVIL ONLY SEEMS TO BE WINNING!**

1.

The church at the end of the first century was living in evil times. A wave of intense persecution against Christians had swept through the land under Emperor Domitian. It was so bad that some were beginning to wonder if the church would survive. Satan and the evil world, just like today, seemed to be winning the day. The book of Revelation was written to give courage to the faithful, and to remind them that, despite appearances, with Jesus they just simply couldn't lose. Evil could not ultimately triumph, nor was it winning. Yes, Satan, a master at propaganda, is pretty good at making us think that evil is stronger than God, but it just isn't true.

We know it's not true because Jesus is Faithful and True. He is faithful and true to His Word. He was completely faithful in keeping God's commandments in our place so that we could be credited with His sinless life. He was faithful to carry every last one of our sins to the cross and take them off our record once and for all. True to His word He rose from the grave and defeated death. Faithful and True took away Satan's power to accuse us of sin and condemn us. Jesus does what He says. So when Jesus promises that all things are working together for the good of those who love God, we can be sure of it. To say that all things are working together for the good of Christ's people, is to say that Christ's people are winning, and that Satan and evil are losing.

No matter what our eyes may tell us, faith tells us that all things serve for the good of God's people and for His plan to save sinners. Evil is not winning. It only may appear to be winning to our very limited human logic.

The Bible is full of examples where evil appeared to triumph, but where, in fact, the Lord had everything working for His own good purposes. Let's just briefly look at two quick examples.

In the book of Acts, when Saul persecuted the Church, overseeing the murder of faithful Stephen, and hauling scores of Christians to prison and death, and when, as a result, Christians were forced to leave their homes, becoming refugees in other lands, Satan looked to be winning. However, the Bible tells us that the scattered believers took their faith wherever they went and shared Christ with whomever they met. In that way Saul's evil actions were used by God to spread the saving message of Jesus so that untold number of souls were rescued from spending eternity in hell. Again, evil only appeared to be winning. Christ was in control all along.

In our second example, when the Son of God was betrayed by one of his own disciples, when he was unjustly sentenced to death by His own countrymen, when the people mocked him as He hung on the cross, evil appeared to have gained the ultimate triumph. However, it was just the opposite. God took the wickedness of men, the work of Satan, and turned it into the greatest possible good. Through Jesus' death, the forgiveness of sins has been secured for all people, so that whoever believes and is baptized is saved!

2.

When evil seems to be winning, we remember that He Who is Faithful and True is, in reality, making evil serve for good as He has promised it would. And when evil seems to be winning, we also remember that **As *King of Kings*, Jesus Will, on the Last Day, Completely Destroy All Evil Forever.**

This truth is vividly and powerfully pictured for us in our text. As we look at these verses, what do we see? We see Jesus in a way we may not be used to thinking of Him. We think of Jesus as the baby that came down from Heaven as Mary's child, so tender and mild. We think of Jesus humbly riding a donkey into Jerusalem. We think of Jesus meekly accepting the cross. But in our text, Jesus is our Risen and Ascended Lord, appearing at the end of time in the fullness of His power and glory.

- Instead of on a lowly donkey, He is pictured as riding a white charger, a warrior's steed. For when He comes again, He will not come to humbly offer His life, but to make war. On the Last Day, Jesus comes on the last day to fight and destroy all who stand against Him.
- On that day He will judge the world with perfect righteousness and justice, meaning there will be no mistakes about who trusts in Him and Who does not. His eyes are like a blazing fire, showing that He can see exactly what is in each and every human heart.
- On His head are many crowns, indicating that every king, ruler, and potentate, will give up their crown to Him, acknowledging, either willingly in faith or reluctantly by force, that He is King and Lord of all.
- He has a name written on Him that only He knows, meaning He is so great words cannot begin to express the mystery of His person and how truly awesome He is.
- His robe is dipped in blood. But this blood is not His own blood which He ransomed the world. Rather His robe is dipped in the blood of His enemies.
- When He returns He will do so in the company of His angels. At His birth, there was a choir of angels, sweetly proclaiming a Savior for all sinners. But on the Last Day He will come with an army of angels, clearly showing that He will come not as a humble Savior, but as a triumphant warrior.
- Out of His mouth comes a terrible swift sword, the Word that will both judge and strike down His enemies.
- He comes to tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of God Almighty, showing that His enemies will be crushed and sentenced to eternal death in hell as easily as a man can crush a grape with his feet. This is God's final and ultimate solution to the problem of evil. God is incredibly patient with this rebellious world. Finally though, like sand in an hour glass, the world's time of grace will run out. A Holy God cannot, and will not, let evil go on indefinitely.

A frightening picture to be sure, yet a comforting one for you and me, and for all who know Christ personally as Savior.

Why so comforting for you and me? If I may direct you to a passage in **1 Thessalonians 4:16**, where it

says that on the last day Christ will descend from heaven “**with a loud command**”, a command spoken by the Archangel. The Bible doesn’t tell us what the command will be or what exact words the Archangel will speak when he announces the Lord’s return. While we don’t know what he will say, we know the effect of the Archangel’s command will be: “Enough! Enough suffering! Enough injustice! Enough child abuse and the killing of the unborn! Enough lying and cheating! Enough twisting of God’s Word and leading poor souls astray! Enough war and bloodshed! Enough sickness! Enough disease! Enough tears! Enough sadness! Enough death! Just plain, enough!” If that’s not what he says, that will certainly be the outcome.

Yes, life can be seen as simply as a child sees it. Good (Jesus) is conquering evil every day, and will conquer it ultimately and forever!

Several years ago, the Saturday Evening Post ran a cartoon showing a man about to be rescued after he had spent a long time shipwrecked on a tiny, deserted island. The sailor in charge of the rescue team stepped onto the beach and handed the man a stack of newspapers. “Compliments of the Captain,” the sailor said. “He would like you to glance at the headlines to see if you’d still like to be rescued!”

Sometimes the headlines scare us. Sometimes we feel like evil is winning. But our Risen, Ascended, and Returning Lord Jesus assures us there is no evil strong enough to keep us Christians from gaining the final and full victory of life eternal. So, dear saints of God, when you begin to shake your head over the horrible things that go on in this present evil age, look to Him Who is Faithful and True, Who is King of kings, and you will see that, indeed, *EVIL ONLY SEEMS TO WINNING!* AMEN!

—**Pastor Michael Wilke**

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