

3.7.2021 Third Sunday in Lent (Luke 11:14-28)

The movie *The Karate Kid* tells the story of Daniel LaRusso, a teenager who moves to Southern California with his mom and quickly finds himself as the target of a group of bullies who study karate at a dojo called Cobra Kai. Fortunately for Daniel, he becomes friends with a repairman named Mr. Miyagi. Miyagi is a martial arts master himself, and he takes Daniel under his wing, teaching him not only how to defend himself, but also training him to compete in a tournament against the brutal members of Cobra Kai.

There's a scene in this movie where Daniel shows up at Mr. Miyagi's house to begin his training. When Miyagi asks Daniel if he's ready to begin, Daniel replies, "Ya, I guess so." To which Mr. Miyagi says, "Daniel-san, we must talk." Miyagi tells Daniel that if you walk on the right side of the road, you're safe, if you walk on the left side of the road, you're safe, but if you walk in the middle, sooner or later, you get squished, just like a grape. Mr. Miyagi goes on to explain that in karate you find the same thing is true. Mr. Miyagi said, You either do karate, yes, or do karate, no, because if you do karate, guess so, you get squished, just like a grape.

When I read our Gospel passage this morning, I couldn't help but think that karate and the Christian faith have this in common, there's no middle ground, no place for the *lukewarm* (Revelation 3:16), no room for a response like "Ya, I guess so" when you've been confronted with the heart-wrenching, yet eternally comforting Truth that the Father gave the life of His only Son to save us. There are only two lanes on the road to the kingdom of God, the lane that leads you to Him, and the one that takes you away from Him, and we're all in one lane or the other. In the passage we read today, Jesus said it this way, "*He that is not with Me is against Me: and He that gathers not with Me scatters*" (Luke 11:23).

In this statement, our Lord eliminates the possibility that anyone can remain neutral in their devotion to God. In this earthly life there is light and darkness, good and evil, God and the enemy of God, and if we are not with Him, then we are against Him. If we're not picking up an oar and rowing with Him, we are not just dead weight in the boat, we're dragging the anchor.

If we are not actively drawing the world to Him by reaching out in love to our neighbor, and gathering with Him, as Christ the Good Shepherd gathers His sheep, then we are like the wolf who catches and scatters the sheep (John 10:1-21).

The truth that there are only two sides in this great spiritual battle is also revealed in the passage we read this morning through a parable that Jesus told about a strong man guarding his palace. He said, *“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil”* (Luke 11:21-22). The fully armed strong man that Jesus speaks of in this parable who’s guarding his own palace is Satan, and the Stronger Man is the Son of God.

Our Savior Christ, the mighty God, who *“created all things”* and *“upholds all things by the word of His power”* (Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:3) is the Stronger Man who attacked and conquered the strong man. The enemy had built himself a fortress, a palace in our hearts that he was guarding with every deceitful weapon he wields, but by the grace of God and through the power of His Holy Spirit at the moment of our conversion God the Son entered into our hearts, He defeated the *fully armed* enemy, and set up His own throne of grace, mercy, and forgiveness where He now dwells and reigns as King. Notice once again that in this parable there is only God and the enemy of God. We are either courageously fighting on the side of our Lord, or we are fighting against Him.

Examples of the truth that there are only two sides in this great spiritual battle are seen throughout the Gospels as well. When you think of the passages we read from the New Testament every Sunday, it’s easy to remember people who stood in direct opposition to each other. We read about the Apostles and the Pharisees, John the beloved disciple and Judas the traitor, the family of Lazarus in Bethany and the council in Jerusalem, Mary who anointed Jesus’ head with oil and the Roman soldiers who crowned Him with thorns, Pilate who ordered His crucifixion and the Blessed Virgin Mary who wept at the Cross. Again, two distinct classes of people, the friends of God on one side of the road, and His enemies on the other. In the context of Matthew 25 you

could also say, the sheep on His right hand, and the goats on the left.

Jesus said, “*He that is not with Me is against Me: and He that gathers not with Me scatters.*” In that statement our Lord eliminates the possibility that you can be a lukewarm Christian. Standing in the middle of the road is not even an option. We are either with Him or we are against Him, and so, as those who stand with Him, we must be outwardly, actively, and completely on His side, working and praying and giving to further His kingdom. You can’t do karate with a “Ya, I guess so,” and you can’t do Christianity that way either. May God give us grace to always be people who are clearly and deliberately with our Lord, people who gather the world to Him, and people who are gathered around Him, now in this earthly life, and evermore in the world to come. Amen.