

10.17.2021 Trinity 20 (Ephesians 5:15-21)

In the wild, predators often don't play fair. They choose their victims based on their physical condition, singling out the very young, the very old, the sick or injured. At some point in our lives, we've probably all seen footage of predators like lions, hyenas, or wolves hunting their prey in this manner, showing a definite preference for the less than fully capable victim. This is what we see in the wild, and this morning I would ask you to consider the truth that something very similar is happening all around us, that these predators aren't the only hunters who kill by scattering and separating their prey, singling out the most vulnerable among us.

In 1 Peter (5:8), Holy Scripture warns us: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”* Our adversary, the devil, is a predator who hunts his prey like a lion, and his name even points to that truth. In New Testament greek he is often called *diabolos*, the root of which means, to scatter. So, the devil, like a roaring lion, terrorizes his prey, he scatters, he separates, and while you'd think that his attacks would lead people to cling even more tightly to one another, time and again he succeeds in tearing us apart.

History is filled with examples of families, communities, and nations being torn apart by our adversary, but let me give you an example of just one of his diabolical attacks that you'll certainly remember. On the night when our Lord was betrayed, Jesus said to His disciples, *“You will all fall away because of Me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’”* (Matthew 26:31). This Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in the Garden of Gethsemane, when our Lord's closest disciples witnessed the enemy attack, and were so filled with fear and dread that they all scattered. They abandoned Him, and ran away.

The work of the devil, the one who Jesus described as a *“murderer from the beginning”* (John 8:44), is *“to steal, and to kill, and to destroy”* (John 10:10), and he engages in this work like a roaring lion who scatters and separates his

prey. This is what he accomplished on that night in the garden, and in our day, when nations and communities, and even many churches and families are so divided, so separated and scattered, we recognize the hand of our adversary at work in the heartache and division we witness on a daily basis.

So, what are we to do? We heard St. Peter's advice: *be sober, be vigilant*, and in the Epistle we read this morning, St. Paul offers similar counsel, saying, "*Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil*" (Ephesians 5:15-16). Through both St. Peter and St. Paul, God speaks to us, encouraging His people to walk carefully, to be wise, to take these dangerous, evil days in which we are constantly under enemy attack, and redeem them for our eternal good and His glory. In this text, God is not only encouraging us, He is challenging us to take a close and careful look at how we walk in these days, to the end that we may turn this time, in which our enemy works to divide and to destroy, into a time of larger life and more intimate union with God and neighbor.

If the challenge before us, as the people of God, is to walk wisely and redeem this time because the days are evil, then the question we may ask is, How do we begin? If we believe the work of our adversary is manifested in this world in selfishness and division, then how do we, as the Body of Christ, begin to promote selflessness and unity? In these deeply divided days that may sound like an impossible task, but God has given us, in the Epistle we read today, the place to begin. St. Paul wrote, "*Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is*" (Ephesians 5:17).

In a sermon a few weeks ago, when speaking about the height and depth, and breadth and length of the Cross, I shared with you a number of verses which describe the breadth of the Cross being as wide as the world, and I'd like to bring them to your attention again today as a means to help us *understand what the will of the Lord is*. This morning, consider these verses, the work they describe God accomplishing, and the way His actions reveal His will. So, at that time I quoted St. John, who famously wrote, "*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son*" (John 3:16), and again St. John who, when

speaking of our Lord boldly declared, *“He is the propitiation for our sin: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”* (1 John 2:2). I quoted John the Baptist, who proclaimed, *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29), the writer to the Hebrews who told us that Jesus tasted death *“for everyone”* (Hebrews 2:9), and St. Paul who wrote to Timothy, *“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all...”* (1 Timothy 2:5-6). Finally, I quoted our Lord, who declared, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh”* (John 6:51), and later in John’s Gospel account Jesus spoke of the Cross, saying, *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself”* (John 12:32).

A few weeks ago I used those verses to convey the truth that God loves you, and sent His only Son to die for you. I share those verses with you again today as a means to communicate *what the will of the Lord is*, and yet on second thought, perhaps it would be easier to simply point to the crucifix that sits on our altar and ask you, What is the will of the Lord? To look upon the only begotten Son of God hanging on the Cross is to know with complete certainty that the will of the Lord is our Salvation, and not our Salvation only, but the Salvation of the whole world.

*Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.* The words we read in our Epistle this morning are meant to challenge not only the foolish way we often think, but the way we act (or fail to act!) when we witness our adversary, like a roaring lion scattering and separating his prey, singling out the most vulnerable among us. There was a time during this pandemic when churches were forced to close their doors, a time when we weren’t able to gather as a community, but that time has long since passed, churches are open and yet many Christians who were once at church on Sunday morning are still at home. They haven’t come back. They’re scattered, separated, physically divided from the Body of Christ on Sunday morning, and we can foolishly choose to just go about our business, to work out our own Salvation,

or we can take a moment to think of them and to understand that the will of the Lord is not only our Salvation, but the Salvation of the world.

Consider this thought: We've probably all seen footage of predators like lions, hyenas, or wolves hunting their prey by scattering the herd and singling out their victim. This morning we acknowledged the truth that something similar is happening among us, that our adversary hunts in the same manner, but now let me ask you this question, have you seen the footage of herds that returned to save one of their own? Have you watched one of the many videos of a young water buffalo or a baby elephant who'd been separated from the herd, attacked and nearly killed, but at the last moment the herd circled back, and in a furious flurry of hooves and horns attacked the predator, and rescued one who was nearly lost?

In these deeply divided days we need to pay attention to that example. In these deeply divided days it is the Church, the many members of one Body (1 Corinthians 12:12) that must circle back, and show the world that we not only love God, we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We care about the Salvation of our neighbor, as we care about our own Salvation. This is where we begin. We walk carefully and redeem this time by endeavoring to love one another as Jesus loves us (John 13:34). Remember, He loves us and "*gave Himself for us*" (Ephesians 5:2), by His grace may we reflect His love by giving ourselves for one another.

For the Unity of God's People.

O GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace; Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord: that as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.