

Easter 7A, 2011

Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

Title: Join the Resistance

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Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

Easter is a time for baptisms- for Brooklyn, Briella, Caiden and for you.

These past six weeks we've been listening to St. Peter as he teaches us what it means to be baptized.

It means that you have been born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It means you have been made holy by the Word of God that stands forever, even when the grass and flowers fade.

It means you will suffer, even if you're doing good.

It means that you are a stone, a brick in the wall of God's house, built on Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone.

It means being prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have in Jesus Christ.

Finally today, St. Peter wraps it up with one final point about baptism.

To be baptized means to resist the devil. You are now part of the resistance.

In your baptism you are made a member of God's army, and the devil is your enemy, your adversary. He prowls around you like a roaring lion.

There are many ways that He will attack you, but he has two main methods of attack.

The most basic way that the devil gets at you is through temptation to sin. The devil will entice you to do something that you know to be wrong, but you do it anyways. You give in to temptation.

But the devil's attack doesn't end there. Once you've sinned, the devil uses that sin to make you feel guilty, terribly guilty, so guilty that you doubt God's love and forgiveness. This is the devil's chief aim- not just to get you to sin (that's easy), but to get you to doubt God, to lose your faith in him.

We sin all the time, whether the devil tempts us or not. Getting you to sin is no big deal. The devil's chief objective is to destroy your faith, to get you to stop trusting in God and in His forgiveness.

The devil will lie to you and say, "There's no way that God could love someone as bad as you. There's no way that God could ever forgive what you've done."

And that's when you look back to your baptism and say, "I belong to God. He wrote His Name on me in Holy Baptism. He will never leave me or forsake me. All my sins died with Jesus on the cross, and I have been baptized into His death and resurrection."

When the devil tempts you to doubt God's love, remember that you are baptized. Remember that God chose you long before you could ever choose him. Remember that Jesus Christ died for you, and make the sign of the cross, the sign that was made over you when you were baptized, the sign of Jesus' victory over Satan.

So that's Satan's chief attack- to get you to sin, and then tempt you lose your faith.

But that doesn't always work with you. You know that you're loved and forgiven. It's hard to shake you loose from that.

So Satan has another method of attack. It's much more sneaky and insidious.

Satan tries to separate you and isolate you from the body of Christ, like a lion cutting off a member of the herd. And he doesn't use your sin. He uses the sins that other people do to you.

It usually goes something like this. Another Christian sins against you, hurts you, abuses you, tells lies or gossip about you, fails to love and forgive you. Sometimes this is a pastor or a spiritual mentor, sometimes a member of your own family.

And that hurt and pain turns to anger. Rather than confront the sin and deal with it through confession and forgiveness, you hold it in, and you let your self-righteous anger fester and grow.

Eventually it doesn't matter if you're wrong or right, that sin, whatever it was, has broken your relationship and eventually tears apart the body of Christ.

This is something that I've seen even here within this congregation. People still harbor grudges. "I'd be happy to help, Pastor, I just don't want to work with this person," or "I just can't get over what this person said or did to me."

If it's sin, then it needs to be pointed out and dealt with. If it's not sin, then let it go. Otherwise the anger that we hold and harbor will drive us apart.

That is the devil's work, dividing us against one another. This is what Jesus warned His disciples about as He prayed for them. "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one."

We talk a lot about the fellowship and unity that we have in the Lord's Supper. We also have unity because of our baptism. We have all been baptized in the same name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We all belong to the same God, and that's where our unity comes from, that where it starts, that why our service begins, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." We share the name, we share the cross.

The Devil tries to destroy this unity. He whispers in your ear, "You're better than them. You're better than those folks in the pew over there. You're a much better Christian."

No. We are all in this together.

So stand firm against Satan's attacks. Stand firm in your baptism. Whether it's the frontal attack where he tempts to doubt God's love and forgiveness, or whether it's the sneak attack where Satan divides you from your brothers and sisters in baptism. Stand firm.

That is all that you are called to do. You are not called to go on a crusade against Satan. You are not called to attack Satan, but to be sober, to be watchful, and to stand firm. Be ready.

The picture is that of a guard on duty. You aren't a Navy Seal or a Green Beret, but you are a watchman stationed to keep watch for the enemy.

You keep watch by praying. Watching and praying go together. Remember Gethsemane.

God has given you a specific area to keep watch over. God has put people in your life in three realms, three circles, for you to keep watch over.

The first realm is your family. Pray for the members of your family, that they would be kept safe from Satan's attacks.

The second realm is your church. Pray for the members of the congregation, for her leaders, and especially for her pastor, that they would be kept safe from Satan's attacks.

Third is your community. Pray for your neighbors and coworkers. Pray for the folks that you volunteer with. Pray for your classmates and teachers. Pray for the elected leaders and for those who work for our safety and security, that they would be kept safe from Satan's attacks.

This is what it means to be baptized- to stand firm, to be sober-minded, to watch and to pray.

And take heart. You do not stand alone. You are not an army of one.

You stand with the rest of the saints, the baptized in the body of Christ. And you stand with Jesus Christ himself. He stands with you against Satan. He has given you the strength to withstand Satan through your baptism.

St. Peter promises you, "The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

If it were up to us to stand on our strength, we would never make it. We would fail miserably and suffer a humiliating defeat.

But we stand not in our strength, but in the strength of Jesus' death and resurrection, given to us in our baptism. Jesus has conquered Satan and the power of sin and death. When you are under attack by Satan, make the sign of the cross, and remember your baptism, remember who you are, and whose you are.

That's why Easter and Baptism go so well together. In the waters of baptism we join Jesus Christ in His resurrection and His victory over death and Satan.

When Satan attacks, resist him. Say to Him, "I am baptized, I bear the Name of Christ, my sins and the sins of the world died with him. You have no power over me."

Alleluia, Christ is risen!