**The Church Militant**

Based on [Luke 11:14-28](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk11.14-28)

Preached on March 24, 2019

The Third Sunday in Lent: Oculi

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This week continues the theme of Spiritual Warfare, central to Lent. We began two Sundays ago with Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness. Last week, Jesus cast out a demon from the daughter of a Cannanite woman who asked in great faith. This week, Jesus casts a demon from a mute man, so that he could speak. Jesus came to cast out demons, he came to wage spiritual warfare by the Holy Spirit, given him in Baptism.

**We also are given the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and this is not only to forgive our sins and to give us saving faith…we are given the Holy Spirit for battle.**

We are called the church militant—the church at war. The church triumphant are those who have died in Christ and are now in heaven with him. They have won their race and kept the faith. But we who are still on earth are not triumphant. We are even given a warning by St. Paul, “**He who thinks he stand take heed, lest he fall.**” It is pig-headed athlete boast of victory before the game is over. And many generals have gone into battle underestimating the enemy and overestimating themselves, and their pride ruins them. So too, Jesus tells his disciples to “count the cost” of their discipleship.

Now, don’t misunderstand. Christ has won the victory, and by faith I am his and he is mine, and I can celebrate his victory over sin, death and the devil. As the church militant, the church at war, it’s not as though it is uncertain how it will end. It is uncertain whose side you will be fighting for when your involvement ends.

Jesus casts out demons and is accused of doing so by the power of Beelzebul…Satan. He says that is absurd, because an army that fights against itself will lose. There are only two armies; those led by the Holy Spirit and those that are not. Then he tells this little parable about an unclean spririt.

**24“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ 25And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. 26Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first.”**

What does this mean? When you are baptized, the evil spirit that dwelt in you is bound up and driven away. **The Holy Spirit comes in, plunders your soul for God and sets your house in order.** But the unclean spirit is not content to pass through “waterless places” unbaptized people. So it returns to the baptized person, to find that the Holy Spirit is no longer there. And so it returns with an army of spirits, and that person is worse off than before baptism.

Baptism gives you the Holy Spirit, but it does not chain Him to you. Baptism saves, but you can fall away again. Baptism is when God steals you back from the devil, sets your house in order so that the Holy Spirit can take residence there. **But the Holy Spirit will not keep residence in a place that does not hear and keep the word of God.** If you are baptized but do not remain in God’s Word by hearing it often and treasuring it, the Holy Spirit will leave such a person, and the unclean spirits will make that person worse off than before baptism.

St. Peter writes, **For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.** – 2 Peter 2:21

There is a spiritual war and we are jars of clay and empty vessels that are subject to the influence of Spirits. There is no neutrality, there is no Switzerland in this World War. Neutrality belongs to the devil. Either you have the Holy Spirit and are of God, and remain in Him. Or if you, through despising the word and choosing to be your own god, drive out the Holy Spirit, another will find you and you will be under it’s influence.

**27As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” 28But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”**

What does this mean? You are not blessed by having been raised by a good Christian mother, or coming from good Lutheran stock. That means nothing if they don’t teach you to remain in the Word of God.

There are people who have went to church every week, baptized their kids in the church, and continue to take them to church until they move out of the house and never come to church again--except to please their parents on Christmas and Easter. **They are not blessed for having been “raised in the church.”** They were not raised in the church if they were not taught to hear the word of God and keep it…in the home, in the public sphere, in their hearts. The guarantee of the Holy Spirit only comes through immersion, not in water, but in the Word of God.

Simply punching your timeclock at church once a week or once a year is not engaging in spiritual warfare. The Church is not there for you to attend…it is for you to use to equip for battle. Hear the word of God and keep it and the Holy Spirit will remain with you.

There are spiritual forces of evil at work, which is why you can’t understand how you feel sometimes. **He makes you hate evil and love the good.** You don’t wrestle against your boss or your spouse, or your neighbor. You don’t wrestle against flesh and blood, you wrestle against demons. And the Holy Spirit is no slouch…he is the sword of God who equips you for battle against all demonic forces. Do not neglect the Word of God by which He comes; but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it and use it for battle.