

Sermon (3rd Sunday in Lent) – 03/12/23

Text – John 15:18-16:4

Theme – “Hated”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We all want to be loved. It’s a natural and normal desire. I mean, if someone *doesn’t* want to be loved, there is something definitely wrong with him, right? As humans, we are made and programmed by God to be social animals – to want to get along, to fit in, to be liked, to be part of the crowd. It is God’s intention that we interact and care for one another. To be part of a family, to have friends, to contribute to the community. And, it would seem, a necessary part of that would be for us to be accepted and loved. Yet, here is Jesus in our text today telling us we will NOT be loved by the world. That, in fact, we will be hated! Not really a recruiting point for prospective members, is it?

But – like everything Jesus says – it IS true. The world DOES hate us. Because it hates Him. Because the fallen/sinful/corrupt world belongs to Satan and is controlled by him. And since he hates God, he hates Christ and he hates us. It is that simple.

And because of Satan’s hatred (which the world mimics), we must expect to suffer for our Christian faith. To be persecuted. To be ridiculed. To be ostracized. To be marginalized. To be rejected. Even to be killed. All the things the world did to our Lord, we should expect it to do to us. Oh, I am not saying that we are at risk right now of being arrested and tried on trumped charges (as was Jesus). Or that the government is out to get us. Or that our neighbors will be chanting “Crucify! Crucify!” anytime soon. But, we would do well to heed our Savior’s words. (pause)

As I said, the world hates Jesus because Satan hates Jesus. And Satan hates Jesus because He has come to take back what the devil had stolen away from Him in Eden. Remember, God had placed

Adam and Eve in the Garden as His representatives. When creation saw them, in effect it saw God. Because Adam and Eve were the perfect representations of their heavenly Father. They had been given dominion over the world – but not to use and abuse it for their own selfish wants. No, to show forth their Father’s love. So, they were to tend it, care for it, nurture it. It was all theirs, but entrusted to them by God for *His* purposes.

However, when they sinned, Adam and Eve put it all into Satan’s hands. Yes, God still had ultimate control over all things (He is, after all, God). But, in a very real sense, it was Satan’s. Just like if someone broke into your house and stole your stuff – legally it is still yours, but now that dirty, rotten thief has it. And what will he do with it?

Well, we know what the devil will do – what he has done, and what he will continue to do as long as he can – with what he has stolen. He delights in nothing but destruction. Ruin. Pain. Suffering. Death. He knows how much God loves His creation, and since Satan cannot attack God, he attacks that which God loves. And God loves nothing so much as He loves mankind. That is why the devil so hates people. That’s why he focuses his evil at man. That’s why he stomps and smashes and squashes us, every chance he gets. Because he knows how much that grieves God.

And that’s also why Satan so hates – and fears – Jesus. Because he knows why Jesus has come. To plunder the strong man who had broken into God’s house and stolen His stuff. And kidnapped His children. Jesus comes to stomp all over the devil. To crush his poisonous, lying head. To undo what he has done by bringing sin and death and hell into God’s world.

The devil hates. Just as God IS Love, so Satan IS Hate. And Evil. And Death. And he hates nothing and no one quite so much as he does Jesus. If he could stop Jesus, then he could keep his ill-gotten gains. Then he could maintain possession of the world. Then he could continue to abuse and

torment and damn mankind. Then he could keep on sticking his finger in God's eye. Oh, Satan knows he can never win – but he will not stop trying.

Look at how he has fought against Christ, from the very beginning. How he was able to get Cain to see the promise of a Savior as referring to *him*, so that Cain became puffed up and proud. How Cain thought he could literally get away with murder, because he was so sure the promise depended on him.

Or think of how Satan convinced the people of Noah's day to disregard the Gospel promise that Noah preached to them, and instead to focus only on this world and life. Or how he persuaded the people at Babel that they could take heaven for themselves by building a tower that reached to the skies. Or how Satan went after every one that God announced would be an ancestor of the Savior – from Abraham onward – hoping that, if he could wipe them out, then the Savior would never be born.

Recall how he led the villagers of Bethlehem to close their doors to Mary and Joseph (and Christ!). How he got Herod to send soldiers to assassinate Him. How he riled up the scribes and Pharisees to question Christ's authority and teaching. How he roused the priests to arrange Christ's betrayal and arrest. How he made Pilate cower in fear and wash his guilty hands of Jesus' blood. How he led the crowd to reject their Messiah and scream for His blood. How he sent shivers of delight through the soldiers, as they mocked Jesus and struck Him, as they laughed as they stole the thread-bare rags off His back and pounded spikes into His hands and feet. How he got the mob to follow Christ through the city streets and out to Calvary, just so they could watch Him suffer. (pause)

Yes, Satan HATES Jesus. There is no other way to put it. And you know *why* he hates Christ so much. Because, in His life AND His death, Jesus has totally and completely defeated him. Because Christ has paid for all sin there at the cross, curing the virus Satan had unleashed in Eden by Adam's sin. Because Jesus has pulled us out of Satan's jaws, out of hell, and given us back our place in heaven.

Because, in Christ, we have eternal life instead of eternal death (with the devil and all his demonic minions).

But, as Jesus warns us again today, Satan also hates US. He hates us because we are no longer his victims and property. He hates us because we are once again God's agents and representatives, to show forth our Father's love (instead of Satan's hate). But, above all, he hates us because we are one with Christ. Joined to Him in baptism. Made members of His body, the Church. Because, as Jesus promised, God lives in us.

So, it should surprise us none that the devil will come after us. Corporately, as the Church. And personally, as individuals.

He comes after the Church, just as he always has. He uses every weapon at his disposal (and they are legion). He uses ridicule and scorn: think of how the Church is portrayed in media's many forms. The Church is for fools, they say. The Church is full of hypocrites, they cry. The Church is led by wicked men, they claim. The Church oppresses this race, or that gender, or this lifestyle, they complain.

And, do you know something? There is truth in some of that! As St. Paul says, not many of us are wise (according to the world's standards). Not many of us noble or powerful or notable. We are but common, simple, ordinary folks. And we make lots of mistakes and errors. We even sin! Every day. In our thoughts and words and deeds. By what we do AND by what we fail to do. We *are* hypocritical, condemning sin in others while we still fall to it ourselves. We do not always respect and honor and cherish others, whether it be because of their race or background, their lifestyle or gender. Yes, it is true that the Church is not perfect. But our Lord is. And we do not put our trust in the Church, but we put our trust only in Him. (pause)

Satan also gets the world to attack us personally. Now, we in our nation have not had to taste the worst of that. At least not yet. Not like our brothers and sisters in other places and times. Think of the martyrs, past and present. The Christians slaughtered in Roman arenas. The saints persecuted in Communist lands. The believers, tortured and beheaded, by Muslims even today. No, we have not had to go through anything even *remotely* like that. Yet, there IS persecution even here, subtle and subdued though it might be.

Think of the young people, laughed at and mocked by their classmates for their faith. Or those Christians whose bakeries and photography studios have been taken away from them, just because they will not be part of a homosexual wedding. Or the Roman Catholic nuns who are forced to pay for abortions through their health insurance plans. Or the attacks against any display of Christian symbols – like nativity scenes at Christmas time – on government property, even if the citizens WANT them there. Or how all religions except Christianity may be respectfully studied in public schools. The list goes on, getting longer – and more overt – over time.

Think of how Satan comes after YOU. Throwing whatever he can against you, hoping to get you to question and doubt. How he tries to make you think God does not care, or cannot help. You know what I mean. We all experience it. The crosses put upon us for our faith, as Jesus calls them. They are there. And they hurt.

But remember, they do not hurt anywhere near what HIS cross did. He suffered infinitely more than do we – He suffered hell itself for us. Just because He DOES love, because He DOES care, because He DOES save. (pause)

Yes, the world does hate us. Because, like its master, it hates God. Because it hates Christ and what He has done for us. And the world, like its master, will act upon that hatred. You will be abused and mocked and reviled for your faith in Christ. You will suffer from the world. It is a fact of life.

But, fear not. For Christ has overcome the world. He has overcome Satan. He has overcome sin and death and hell. And, in Him, so do we.

We have forgiveness and peace, even if it sometimes seems the very opposite. We have joy and bliss, even if now we suffer and grieve. We have eternal life, even as we live in a world full of death and pain. We have heaven, even if the world tries to give us hell.

You are God's children, not Satan's playthings. And your Father will bring you through all of it. He has promised. And, in Christ, it is done. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

OS – Offertory/Offering
FE – Nicene Creed