21st Sunday after Trinity
West Henrietta - 1961

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

Ephesians 6: 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

THE DEVIL

The spiritual worth of this past week can scareely be put into words. Once again God proved Himself faithful to His promise: My Word shall not return unto Me void!" As the people of our congregation went out in the power of the Holy Spirit to bear witness for Christ, the hearts of people everywhere were touched by the power of the Gospel. 31 children were found for Sunday School - half again as many as are already enrolled. At least 3 want to be baptized in the Christian faith; 7 want to become members by transfer or reaffirmation of faith. The great inspiration and soul-sustaining strength of the evening services have passed forever into eternity - never again to be recaptured in quite the same way. Those of you who were here know the truth whereof I speak. Those of you who were absent - you are the losers. Pray God that you have an excuse that will stand before Him. Not only did you miss the opportunity to strengthen your own faith in the Word of God; but you missed the chance to bear witness to others of the love of your Savior by your very presence in God's House for worship and adoration.

Only the devil himself would dare to say that this is not true. Only the devil would dare to say that the words of Jesus are not so: Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve! Only the devil would dare to say that it is all right to put other interests ahead of God, that it is not absolutely necessary to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and mind; and you neighbor as yourself. Only the devil would try to deprive you of the blessings of worship, the assurance of sins forgiven, the peace of Holy Communion, and the glory of Christ waiting for you in heaven at the end of your days. Be careful now - I have warned you soon enough.

The devil is an antagonist not to be taken lightly. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. The devil and his forces are not comic strip characters nor mythical creatures with horns and forked tails. The devil represents the opposition if we are on the side of God. If

we hope to be neutral and non-committal, the devil represents the leadership of the forces with which we automatically associate ourselves. Here there is no neutral ground, and no truce will ever be declared.

The devil is all around, and he is busy, working behind the scenes to bring about the ruin of mankind. By his contrivances the very discoveries which could have benefited mankind are turned into weapons of destruction for the snuffing out of human life. It is no accident that we talk today about the hell bomb.

The devil incites rudeness and lovelessness among people. He likes nothing better than to see Christians angry at each other. The devil goes to church, practically every Sunday. He tries to get the preacher to preach anything else except the Gospel of Christ, and he tries to turn the fellowship of Christians into just another social club. He starts a rumor here and plants a lie there, attempting to get Christians into conflict with each other. In the name of truth, he turns love into hate and fear. In the name of liberation, he undermines truth and destroys faith. With the utmost audacity he even deceives people into thinking that they are following God when actually they are following him, the father of lies.

The devil is at work in society. He public relations men are busy everywhere proclaiming that success is God and the dollar is his prophet. The devil is a great youth worker. He is out to convince the teen-agers of the world that obedience is old-fashinned and religion is for sissies. Do what comes naturally and take what you want, he urges, for today the flower is in bud and tomorrow it dies. The devil pushes good causes, turning them into evil purposes. He loves righteousness and virtue, if by them he can turn people into trusting in themselves instead of in God who made them and redeemed them.

The devil has a full schedule. The task he sets out for himself brings him into contact not only with masses of people but with individuals. The fiery darts of the devil are personal. Each is aimed at a specific target. These darts take a million different shapes. They come in the form of deadly discouragement sweeping over us and causing us to say, What's the use, faith does not work. They

appear in the form of sharp temptation which in a single moment can cause a man or woman to forget the resolutions of a lifetime. They attack with the illusion that money and security are so terribly important, that God can wait. Fiery darts are all about us in sickness, fear, loneliness, want, hopelessness, despair, and boredom.

The evil day comes quickly and can catch us completely unaware. The evil day of which the apostle speaks is not judgment day, but that day when the enemy singles you out for special attention: when nothing seems to go right and God seems to be on vacation. The fiery darts hit hard on the evil day. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and, having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

There is a girdle of truth - God's truth. The evil one deals in lies. The bigger the lie, the more people will believe it. Hitler operated on this premise, and Communism in our day has demonstrated graphically what can be done with the big lie. There is the lie that you have to have money in order to be happy, and the lie directed to young people: to be popular - and surely you want to be popular - you have to be immoral. Many boys and girls have believed that lie. There are the religious lies: It makes no difference what you believe. Take whatever you want to from the Bible and reject the rest of it. You can form your own version of religion. What you believe doesn't really make any difference as long as you are sincere. There are Christian lies: You can be a good Christian without going to church. All of them come from the same source - the devil. Of him Christ said, He is a liar and the father of lies.

Fight the devil with the girdle of truth, God's Word. God's Word points to Christ. It calls to faith in Him: I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me. God's Word urges us to a way of truth: Love

one another. Present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God. Keep yourself pure. Truth cannot merely be stored in our minds and hearts; it must be lived. It is necessary to speak the truth and to live by it. Truth lived out in your life will prove once and for all that truth is stronger than lies and that God rather than the devil really rules the universe. Truth fights back, protected by the breastplate of righteousness. Christ took the place of the unrighteous. He died the death of the unrighteous that every man may stand before God boldly and unafraid. The righteousness of Christ, received and accepted by faith, turns the darts of the wicked one away, as does the shield of faith.

The shield of an ancient warrior was a tremendous thing. It covered his entire body and was thick enough to withstand any missle. Still it was light enough to carry. A warrior with a good shield was a regular one-man tank. The shield kept the enemy away and kept him from being hurt from behind. So faith keeps the enemy from getting at you from behind. In order to overcome you, the devil must get at you. If your faith is unwavering and firm, a real shield, always backed up by the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, Satan will not have a place to start on you. Once he gets inside you defenses, he can plant doubt in your heart and then the rest is easy. For example, if death comes to the family or serious illness, Satan is right there to plant doubt in God: See, God isn't good at all. He doesn't keep His promises if He lets things like this happen. Let your guard down, and you will be in danger. Rather, hold up the shield and say: No matter what happens, I will trust in God. The shiled of faith will make you invincible.

The devil is real, but Christ is real, too. Salvation is the product of that violent, thrilling struggle in which Christ was engaged on Calvary's Cross. He calls us to follow Him into the battle against the forces of evil. The fight is on to the finish. You and I are involved. We cannot be spectators. Like it or not, we are participants. We are all under attack. There is a way to win - by putting on the armor of God against the wiles of the devil. Refuse God's armor and you lose. Use God's armor and the promise of victory is sure. None wil l be carried to heaven

on flowery beds of ease. Watch the conflict passively and you lose it. Pick up your weapons, put on your armor, and you will win it. Take unto the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and, having done all, to stand.

Amen.