

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER—CONFIRMATION SUNDAY

1 Peter 5:6-11

Beware of Devil!

Christ Lutheran has been a regular Old Country Buffet for the devil over the years. He has eaten well, because he has had easy prey. “He’s just that age. He’ll grow out of it.” “She’ll be back when she gets married.” “He’s just sowing his wild oats.” “She’s just experimenting.” Then you look at the pictures of our confirmands, and you see why assumptions are so often asinine.

Believe it or not, when I was younger, I was a portly little fellow. I know you can’t picture it, being that the pounds have just melted off, but it is true. One of the main drawbacks of being a “husky” boy, as clothiers dubbed us, was the dog next door. When we were playing sports in my backyard, the ball would inevitably go over the fence. How did we decide who had to get it? Paper, rock, scissors. Needless to say, that is not my best game. Our neighbor’s dog was mean and did not like visitors. We were safe from it in my yard, but once you climbed that fence, you were like a jolly rancher in Maggie’s reach. My buddies always got a kick out of seeing me huff and puff trying to get out of the neighbor’s yard before the dog noticed me and began his charge. I was easy prey because I was dumb enough to enter his yard.

As you have already, you will have many times in life when you will have a decision to make. Do you stay on your Father’s side of the fence, or do you jump into the devil’s backyard? Riding the fence won’t do any good, because the devil can jump. You will have to make a decision—oftentimes a decision that will impact the rest of your life. Once you make that decision, you will have the rest of your life to consider it, whether to rue it or to give thanks for God’s guidance in it. The only way you will make the right decision is if you recognize just how big and mean that dog is next door and how important your Father’s fence of protection truly is.

Sometimes you may be tempted to tease that dog, to see how close you can get without him biting you. This may seem to work at times. You may laugh as he bangs his head against the fence, but when you rely on your own powers to fight the devil, eventually you are going to get bit. Arrogance and pride will only make you a more delicious meal, because what we’ve worked hardest for always tastes best, and this is true of the devil as well.

Statistics say somewhere between 50-70% of confirmands fall away from the church. Raise your hand if you are going to be the 50-70% from this group. I could guess who it might be, but, ultimately, you will decide, and if you smugly insist it will not be you, it will be you, because, as the proverb says, *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* The devil feasts most abundantly on those who do not fear him, and in assuming you cannot fall away, you are not fearing him. One of the Twelve fell away from Christ. Two of the Twelve betrayed him. Eleven of the Twelve hid in his darkest hour, just hours after assuring him: *“Surely not I, Lord.”*

You are today becoming an adult member of this congregation. As an adult, you will be what you eat. Will you, with Jeremiah, eat the words of the Lord and his body and blood in the sacrament, or will you eat the poisonous cyanide of Satan? There will be no one to coddle you. Perhaps you will make the mistake many make, and assume that whatever you find in America’s religious smorgasbord that looks nice, makes you feel good, tastes great, and is seasoned with religious overtones is wholesome and nutritious. But what tastes great is often less filling. A little poison in big portions of food accomplishes the same goal as a lot of poison in little portions. It just takes a little longer, but watch National Geographic. Lions are patient hunters. In fact, I know some Lions that have waited over fifty years to reach their goal.

Any of you who have ever put on pounds know that it doesn't happen overnight. Perhaps you don't even notice it until someone you haven't seen in a while points it out. By then, however, it is too late. While it was easy to gain weight, it is extremely difficult to lose it. If you need proof, look at your aunts' and uncles' high school yearbooks. So also, false teaching spreads slowly, but once you've taken it on, little by little, perhaps without even noticing, it is extremely difficult to shed. The devil has his teeth in you, and it is not easy to pry open a lion's mouth.

My advice to you today is simple, based on Peter's words, and confirmed by the experience of the church: wrestle. Wrestle with your doubts. Wrestle with the temptations of the world and the flesh. Wrestle with the devil. Don't dance. Wrestle, to resist him. Don't wrestle as one who has never wrestled before. Use what you have learned. Use God's Word and the sacraments. Fight with the fury of one who knows the cost of losing: eternal damnation. Like any good athlete, study your sport. Learn from those who've spent more years wrestling than you have and draw comfort from the example of the saints who wrestled centuries earlier and have received the crown of life. Draw warning from those who have wrestled poorly, being pinned down to hell.

As you wrestle, remember the first rule of wrestling: never let your guard down. Stay out of the devil's backyard. Keep your fences high, building them up with Word and sacrament. Be humble and sober-minded, always aware of your ability to fall, always examining yourself for the places you are exposed to the flaming darts of the devil. Always remember that none of this advice will count for anything if you are not the little guy on a powerful tag-team, partnered with Christ Jesus, who has already vanquished the devil and all his evil schemes.

I pray I have scared you today, and not just you, but everyone here, especially those making their semi-annual appearances. I pray that all of you today have come to know how quickly the momentary pleasures of the flesh give birth to eternal consequences. I pray I have scared you, but I pray that you are not scared, for Peter closes our lesson with these words: *"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen."*

God loved you enough to give his life for yours. He has called you to eternal glory. You are precious to him, and he is determined to keep you as his own. He has given you the Word and the sacraments for that purpose. He has given you brothers and sisters in Christ to that end. You are now a part of a holy family, with a Father in heaven and a Brother, who has given his life for you, seated at his right hand. Cherish this family. Keep your baby pictures always in front of you, remembering your baptism and the joy it brought your heavenly Father to hold you in his arms. Don't miss the family meals, because mealtime is a sacred time for a strong family. Listen to your family. Learn where you've been and where you're going. Learn how much you are loved. Listen to your Father speak; he speaks only through his Word. And talk to your family. Talk to your Father in heaven and your Brother at his right hand in prayer. Don't talk like you are their butler. Talk like you are family. Do all these things, because while there is nothing you can do to gain salvation, there is plenty you can do to lose it.

There may oftentimes be 50-70% of confirmands that go astray, but it need not be that way. Statistics only tell us what has happened. They cannot dictate what will happen, because God's grace, God's Word, God's sacraments, unlike the devil, cannot be fenced in. Today is your first confirmation. May *the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you* again in death, when the vows you make today are fulfilled. Amen.