

We Are Beggars It's True

John 12:27-33

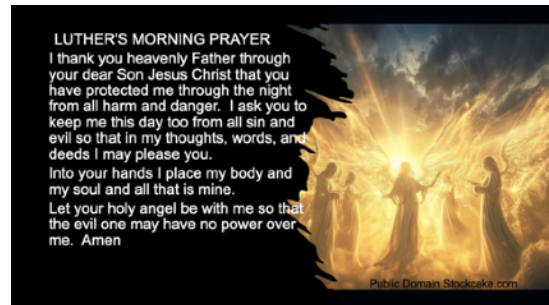
Series: #1 — *sSpiritual Warfare*

Luther's Morning Prayer:

I thank you heavenly Father through your dear Son Jesus Christ that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask you to keep me this day too from all sin and evil so that in my thoughts, words, and deeds I may please you.

Into your hands I place my body **and my soul** and all that is mine.

Let your holy angel be with me so that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen.



Martin Luther knew the spiritual realities of spiritual attack. I'm so glad that he wrote morning and evening prayers which I can pray for God's presence and protection.

And Luther, perhaps more than anyone, would also refer us at the outset of any discussion on spiritual attack to the end of the story: that on the cross and by his resurrection Jesus has won once and for all the spiritual battle. He has overcome the powers, the spiritual powers of sin, of death and of the devil. And he promises all those, all we who put our trust in him, that we too will surely live this victory with him. Amen! This is your reality and mine. Thanks be to God!

I don't enter into this space lightly or pretend to be some sort of expert. I'm a pastor and a Christian on the journey like you. I'm very thankful for this book 'Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care'. Our pastoral care staff and volunteers have access to this in our ministry and its helpful for teaching and guiding us in our pastoral caring.



In it is a rite on pastorally caring for someone facing spiritual attack or spiritual oppression. Again, this resource starts with the end of the story which is also our foundation for daily living:

“The Son of God became a human being in order to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8) and to

deliver people from bondage to him (Hebrews 2:14, 15) by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:28). Christians have been set free from the power of the devil through Christ's death and resurrection.” This is your story and mine. God's reality for us. The rite then goes on to say “but at the same time Satan continues to accuse and torment the faithful through their guilt, fear, resentment, hatred and the like”. Above all, the rite points me to always to God's Word of promise in Christ, and the means of grace for me in worship.

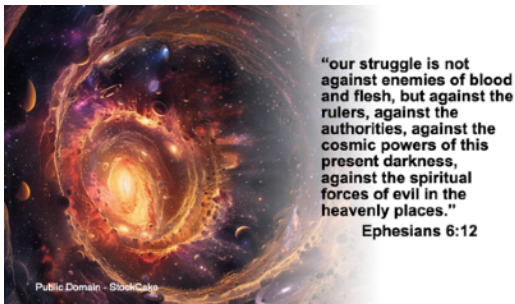
So, what are some examples of spiritual warfare/ attack? Here's a few from my experience:

1. The spiritual element of life struggles (“I’m not good enough.” “I’m not worthy”) sickness, disagreement, relationship breakdown, struggles with faith, through the “long night”
2. Before major missional/witness events and carrying out God’s commission to love: e.g., when we were preparing for Indonesia or starting a new ministry
3. Our whole church leading to Convention (different and strongly-held views)
4. The subtle day-to-day which takes us in our busyness away from God
5. We become spiritually smug or superior to others
6. Others are spiritually condemning of us
7. When we are spiritually lazy/tempted away (this is my story as a young adult. Witness of others for me is and has been vital. Don’t underestimate your witness for others. *Screwtape Letters* is always a good read to come back to.)
8. The long dark night of pain.

What else would you name?

A few weeks ago, on Ascension Day, we heard Jesus promise “power” from on high, when the Holy Spirit would be given to the disciples and to the Church. We briefly reflected then that we are all spiritual beings, as much as we are rational, physical beings, for example.

God speaks of this.

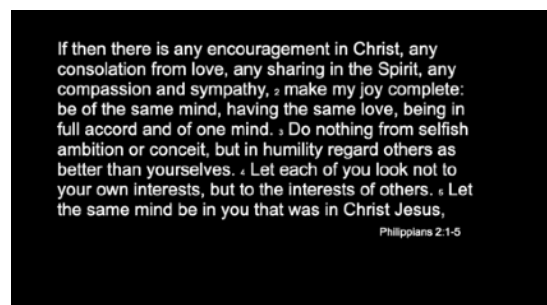
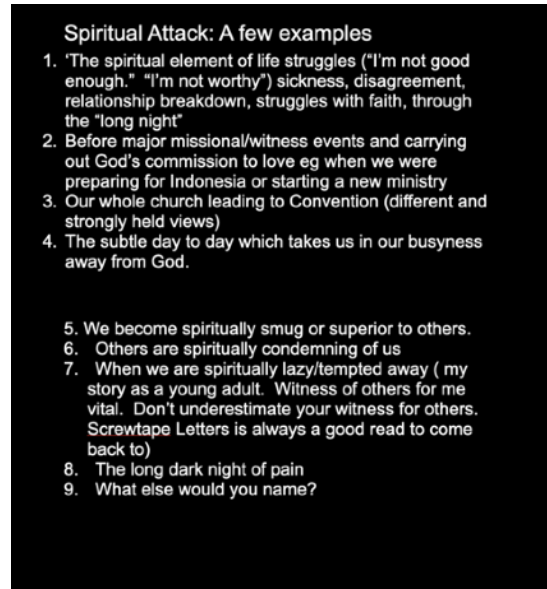


For example Paul says in Ephesians 6 that “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Here is the spiritual reality of life in terms of the battle.

Paul also regularly calls us to have the mind of Christ and to be like-minded as Christians.

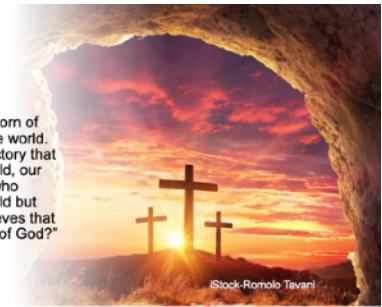
And then also during the Easter season, we heard of the victory, the season of resurrection rejoicing we read about in I John 5:4-5.

“for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”



I John5:4-5

Those who confess Christ as Lord conquer the world, not through some human power, but we spiritually overcome the ruler of the world through Christ. We overcome by receiving the gift of faith as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts through the Word, and as we confess and live and grow in that faith by living as people who love as Christ first loved us. This is the spiritual reality and victory. And this is what Satan wants to fight against: God's love in Jesus shining through the darkness of sin, death and the devil to bring the light of life.



The Pastoral Rites book puts this into perspective, I think, in terms of addressing spiritual oppression. "Pastors [and all Christians] should take care to avoid a credulous obsession with spirits or skepticism about them; to avoid either labelling all psychic phenomena as demonic or accepting everything spiritual as a gift from the Holy Spirit." It goes on to give us some good advice "it is recommended that a pastor or any Christian seek the counsel of other pastors and other Christians in such matters.

The spiritual victory is won by Christ for me and you as a Christian and for us as Church, as community of faith... congregation. We walk in victory as children of God and as family of faith. And we fight the battle guided and protected by the Holy Spirit in the Word and Sacraments which bring us to Jesus."

Over the next few weeks, I'm going to speak of this with you as community. What does God say?

Today: Living in the light: "We are beggars it is true"

Week 2: The "already but not yet" of the victory over Satan as we live on earth.

Week 3: God's armour; our sure defence:

Jesus' death and

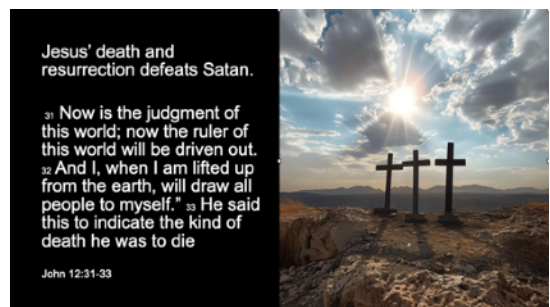
resurrection



•Today:
Living in the light: "We are beggars it is true"
•Week 2:
The "already but not yet" of the victory over Satan as we live on earth.
•Week 3:
God's armour; our sure defence

defeats Satan (see John 12:31; 16:11)

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.



John 12:31-33

The sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross drives out the "ruler of the world", and Jesus himself draws us to the place of Jesus' victory through his death and resurrection. Jesus, although he himself as a human is troubled in his soul, goes to the cross for us and all people.

The victory is won. The gift of the Spirit points us to the victor, Jesus Christ.

But we can still face attack. We are not somehow spiritually bullet proof from the attacks of Satan, of the world and of our sinful selves.



This why the call of Luther in Small Catechism is for us as Christians in the home and as community to be built up like the physical building next door will be on solid sure foundations: receiving from God his means of grace and life in worship, Word and prayer to know our Lord Jesus for us. God for us especially in the place of spiritual attack.

A dear Christian friend told me recently of a long night of pain. He was in hospital having suffered very painful injuries. This particular night his pain was excruciating. It would not subside. He was on his own. He knew the spiritual attack which accompanied this physical pain and yet... and yet he said he came to an amazing place. Later he could recognize it as a place of light and peace, despite the immense pain he was suffering. He came to the place of saying "God, I'm ready. God, I'm totally in your hands. If you will, take me home." In this dark place he found that his faith and trust in the promise in the one who had already won the victory brought him to God in such a deep way as he had never before experienced. He was, in that dark place, totally in trust in the hands of Jesus.

They say that the light shines brightest in the darkest place. Easter Day!

As Luther came to the end of his life, he said the words, "We are beggars, it is true!" Luther came to find that it is by relinquishing our own claims of power (Original Sin) and trusting wholly and solely in God that we come to know most fully, and share in, the victory, and make a difference by shining this light.



31 Now is the judgement of this world, now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

We pray: Heavenly Father, Into your hands I place my body and my soul and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me so that the evil one may have no power over me.

Amen.

Video of the service including the above address: https://youtu.be/_3oBxIGSqx0