

Sermon for Sunday, May 26, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor  
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"MAKING THE DEVIL KEEP HIS DISTANCE"

St. Luke 11:14-26

Text: "Do you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" I Corinthians 3:16

Most of us had put the devil and all his demons to rest. We had written them all off as remnants of a superstitious past. Then some strange things began to happen. We had the Sharon Tate murders by a self-styled "devil" named Charles Manson, who was the leader of a Satan cult; we saw the emergence of the so-called "Satan Church". For example, in Germany, the most intellectual and sophisticated nation of the world, it is reported that there are three million Satan worshippers and seven million sympathizers. In France, there has been a revival of the black mass and black magic. Here in America, there is a most unusual interest in Satan. It is estimated that the Church of Satan has over 200,000 members and the chief of police of San Francisco has said this devil religion is one of the most serious threats to law-abiding life.

Most of you have seen articles in the papers about courses or classes being offered in schools and colleges teaching various forms of the occult and that the classes are jammed. This revival of interest in Satan has found expression in two movies; "Rosemary's Baby," where a child is conceived by a demon father and a human mother, and, of course, "The Exorcist," the story of a young girl becoming possessed by a demon. Are we to simply laugh this off as a fad that will pass or is there something more serious, more sinister, involved?

Someone has observed that demonic activity and interest in Satanic forces has become prevalent in certain specific periods of history. The first was at the beginning of creation of man in the Genesis story; the demonic is very prevalent there. The second time is in the story of the Exodus when God makes a mighty move to create for himself a people; the demonic suddenly becomes active. The third time in the history was during the lifetime of Jesus Christ. And it is as though demonic forces were mobilizing themselves to defend their kingdom from destruction by Jesus Christ. The fourth time that the demonic has come into prominence is today. There are those who say that the return of Jesus Christ is known by evil forces, and that at that time when Jesus is coming again soon, their activity increases as they mobilize themselves against the final victory of Jesus Christ. Whether that's accurate or not, I would not venture to say, but it certainly gives pause for thought.

What are some of our prominent religious leaders saying. Let me share with you what the minister of the Madison Avenue Church in New York, one of the more prestigious pulpits in all of America, has said. Recently writing in Presbyterian Life, he wrote this, speaking of the demonic element, "This kind of experience is spreading rapidly and has to be taken much more seriously than we have in the past. The time for ignoring it or laughing it off is over. For too long we have lived with a comfortable, rationalized religion, leaving the mystic,

the emotional and what we call the 'spooky' to the ecclesiastical underworld or to psychiatrists. In the main-line churches there has been little room for the supernatural of any hue, divine or demonic. Both angels and devils have evaporated from our consciousness. They have disappeared into a little box labeled 'primitive superstitions.' Now the lid is off, and it is obvious that the sedate, sensible, secularized religion of the recent past is unable to cope with the storm that is bursting upon us." Billy Graham, writing in Decision magazine, says, "Some scholars maintain that (Jesus) was simply giving in to the thought of his day (concerning demons); that if he came back to walk on the earth today he would not accept such teaching. That is not true, for on many occasions Jesus ascribed actions to demons. Our Lord Jesus Christ believed that there is in the world a supernatural force of evil personified by the devil, and that there are genuine, unclean spirits and demons that inhabit the spiritual world." The late Oxford scholar, C. S. Lewis, who was a converted atheist and a famous defender of the Christian faith, once wrote, "there are two equal and opposite errors, into which our race can fall about devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive interest in them..." He goes on to add, "...I do believe... in the demonic in life." Another great Christian writer, Dr. Leslie D. Weatherhead, has written, "It may be that there are evil entities in the universe who have mysterious access to the lives of men." The Bible puts it this way, "Awake! Be on the alert! Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, prowls around looking for someone to devour. Stand up to him, firm in faith..." (I Peter 5:8)

St. Paul speaks of principalities and powers - always at war with God. For myself, I cannot doubt the reality of demonic powers. I think most people who have lived in recent years would agree that something is, indeed, wrong with our planet. Think of the wars of this century, the tortures and murders, the violence, the cruelties, the child beatings, the tremendous traffic in drugs, the corruption in high and low places.

Have you seen the devil? Yes, you have, but in all probability you didn't recognize him. He hides behind many facades, he wears many faces, he uses many disguises. For an alcoholic he comes disguised as a social drink. For a greedy person, he comes in the form of a smart opportunity. For a proud person, he comes wearing the face of self-righteousness. He is never right out in the open where we can see him for who and what he is, but he slips through the cracks of our armour and before we know it, he has breached our defenses and we are locked in battle within our own souls with the devil himself. Then we begin to discover for ourselves what St. Paul meant when he said, "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."

In our scripture this morning we read the words of Jesus, "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

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This year we have seen the amazing spectacle of one of the highest officials of our nation who had become in the minds of many of us the moral and ethical spokesman for those things we believed have made America great. And yet there must have been an emptiness, a house set in order, for he had been invaded by seven demons worse, more evil, than the other. And the last state of that man became worse than the first.

Jeremias, the famous Bible scholar, tells us that the opening sentence of this statement that I just read from scripture, should properly be translated, "When an unclean spirit has been driven out of a man. . ." That leads me to two quick observations. First, the devil doesn't leave us of his own accord. He must be driven out. He doesn't give up on us easily. Second, we learn that he can be driven out. We do not have to be subjected to his power and his dominion. There is the divine possibility of being freed, of being set loose from the control of Satan because Jesus not only tells us he can be driven out, we know that he himself often did precisely that. He has power over Satan.

This brings me to the three observations that I want to make about the scripture I read a moment ago. The first observation is this: having driven the devil out of our lives, he isn't willing to stay out. Having defeated an evil spirit or a wicked desire, doesn't mean it stays defeated forever. To put it another way, temptation to sin, to wickedness, to evil, is persistent.

That's really too bad, isn't it? It would be great if we could meet a temptation successfully once and be done with it. But temptation is like a bad penny - it keeps turning up again and again. Our scripture says, "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return. . .'" Now, that describes exactly my experience with the devil and temptation! He returns. Isn't that your experience, too? Even Jesus had this same experience. Sometimes we get a misconception about Jesus. We think he wrestled with the devil during his temptation in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry and that was the end of that forever. Nothing could be further from the truth. St. Luke, concludes the story of Jesus' temptation with these words, "And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season." (St. Luke 4:13) Temptation was to be a part of the hard reality of the life of Jesus and again and again he was to come to grips with the devil in his own life. And if you'll think in your minds of that scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, near the time of crucifixion when our Lord is down on his knees praying to God and sweating, as it were, drops of blood, he is in grips with Satan himself; Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me the temptation to avoid the consequences of the cross. As the writer of Hebrews put it, he was tempted as we are.

The second observation I want to make is this: Personal reformation - cleaning up your life, your soul - sweeping out the dirt, setting it in order - is not enough. Jesus said, "And when he comes he finds it empty, swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first." Just for example, the world drove Kaiserism out of

Germany, but the house was left empty. Hitlerism arrived to find a vacuum and Germany had seven other devils more evil than the first and the world experienced World War II.

In her autobiography, Gertrude Stein, speaking of the so-called intellectuals she met in Paris - the existentialists - said it seemed to her that they suffered from a "nothingness." I presume she meant that those men and women belonged to nothing, were mastered by no great loyalty, had no over-powering sense of dedication to anything, and served no god. One of their leaders, Albert Camus, ended his life by driving his automobile at high speed into a tree. No, it isn't enough to drive temptation and evil out of our souls if we leave life empty. Nature abhors a vacuum and evil comes back with seven other devils and we are worse off than before.

This brings me to the third observation I want to share with you this morning and it is this: the only way to make the devil keep his distance is to let Jesus Christ into your life. The Bible says that for the Christian, "He (the power) that is in you is greater than he that is in the world." Evil is afraid of Jesus. The demons cried out in his presence. And when evil spirits come back to peer in through the windows of your soul the only way to make sure they keep their distance is to let them see that your house - your soul - your life - is filled with the presence of Jesus.

One of the most famous sermons ever preached in America - and which, incidentally, set off a religious revival that swept the country - was entitled, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." It took me a long time to understand the meaning of that title. If you have a new affection in your heart, a new love in your life for Jesus that is all-consuming, it expells, it keeps out, anything else. Yes, the expulsive power of a new affection.

Our text for this morning is taken from I Corinthians 3:16. Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth and said, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" If a cleaned up life is surrendered to Jesus, his Spirit fills our lives and we are the temple of the divine. Evil will find no empty soul when it returns if Jesus is there.

I have a great concern today about those who have become enchanted, focused in on evil spirits and my concern takes two directions; number one, those who are getting involved in Satanism (evil spirits), they are opening their lives to dreadful possibilities. My other concern is with Christians who are focusing in on demonology and who are becoming obsessed with the concept of demon possession. But the Bible says in Revelation, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me." It is not enough to set your house in order if you do not invite Jesus into your heart. Without him, we will eventually be overwhelmed by evil. But with him, we become God's temple for His spirit will dwell within us. And when your heart and life are surrendered to Jesus, when His spirit fills you, the devil will keep his distance. During World War II, the Lutheran Bishop Berggrav of Norway was imprisoned by the Nazis. After the Allied victory and his release, the Bishop said, "There is a God; there is a law there is an enemy; and there is a victory." Do you have that victory this morning?