



Sermon delivered by
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Quail Hollow Presbyterian Church
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“The Lion Tamer”

(I Peter 4: 12-14; 5: 6-11)

It has been my belief and it is my observation that the Christians of the first century had a *healthy*, and I want to emphasize the word *healthy*, they had a *healthy* respect for the reality of evil. Jesus was under no illusion when it came to evil. Our Lord’s temptation in the wilderness was not some figment of His imagination nor was it some bad dream. Evil engaged our Lord, and there was plenty on the line, to say the least. St. Paul was under no illusion, either. He came right out and said it: You and I are involved in spiritual warfare, not political, not emotional, not cyber, but spiritual warfare. And, according to Paul, in the battle between good and evil, the stakes are high, the stakes are very high.

Thus, it is not surprising to read Peter’s warning to stay alert, to be vigilant, to be on our spiritual toes. Evil is on the move. Evil is on the prowl, and like a hungry lion, evil is looking for someone like you and me to devour, to swallow, to neutralize so our witness to Jesus Christ will be eliminated, which, of course, can never happen. Make sure you caught this: the use of the word “to devour,” “to swallow” reminds you of what? It should remind us of another kind of swallowing and devouring, and it has to do with Christ Jesus. Of course, I refer to the Sacrament of Holy Communion, to the bread and to the cup you and I consume so we become one with Christ. Peter uses the same image, but his image is not to emphasize becoming one with Christ, but one with whom? With evil. Evil seeks to devour us so we become one with evil, complicit and obedient, and that’s not a good thing, not for us and not at all.

Peter tells the early Christians as he tells you and me today to resist evil, and we do that not so much with weapons of steel, but with what? *With our faith*, with our witness and our confession that Christ is Lord because Christ is risen, and in His risen presence Jesus Christ remains our only sure defense. How I enjoyed singing our opening hymn of praise this morning, and especially singing it defiantly in light of last week's suicide bombing in Manchester, England. In Martin Luther's timeless hymn of faith, he reminds us of something we must never forget. Luther once wrote and we now sing: *for still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; his craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal*. I hope you heard that. I hope that sank in. I hope you understand what it means that there is no equal on this earth to evil. We are no match for the ways of evil. No one, not one of us can go toe-to-toe with evil and expect to prevail. Our only hope, our only *proven* hope is Jesus Christ, and by His empty cross are we assured, are we guaranteed, are we promised that the end of evil is not just a matter of time; evil has been defeated. That's not up for debate. What is up for debate is whether or not you and I will use the defense God has provided, and allow that defense to work for us through our faith that Christ is Lord because Christ is risen. At the end of the day, it is either you and me against evil, which is a losing proposition; or, it is the risen Christ defending us from evil, and that is the only recipe for victory.

I am told by those who know such things that the generation called the "Millennials" do not accommodate evil in their world view of reality; they consider evil to be passé, irrelevant, old-fashioned. And yet, when such a heinous crime as last Monday's suicide bombing occurs, the use of the word "evil" fills the air. Friends, there is nothing, *nothing* passé about evil. Evil is not some misguided individual. Evil is not some form of bad luck. Evil is as Peter says a personality called the devil, one who is on the prowl, and unless you and I have faith in the only lion tamer skillful enough to defeat evil, then we will

live constantly in a heap of danger, we will live always at risk, and we remain so very, very vulnerable to becoming one with evil. Faith in Jesus Christ is both strategically defensive and just plain smart. You better believe it: evil is armed with cruel hate, and there is no equal on earth for who evil is and for what evil can do; no equal at all. Our only defense is faith in Jesus Christ, the belief that there is only One Who is greater, only One Who is smarter, and only One Who is stronger than evil, and that One is the risen Christ.

Notice what Peter writes, that we should not be surprised at the “fiery ordeal” that is taking place. In Peter’s day, the “fiery ordeal” referred to the Christians who were going to their death for confessing Christ as Lord, for believing in Jesus Christ over all the other rulers, the kings and queens of the day; and some Christians, as we know, as history tells us, some Christians were put to death as a form of entertainment. Think the coliseum in Rome. In the 21st century, the “fiery ordeal” refers to Christians and others who are being terrorized for not believing in another faith; it is people like you and me who are being slaughtered for refusing to submit to a belief that is untrue, bogus, without foundation. I find it most interesting that 2000 years ago Peter told his fellow Christians to be aware, to be alert, to be vigilant for the evil lurking around the corner. That’s what you and I are being told *in our day*. If you see something, say something; be on your toes. Stay aware, be vigilant, stay awake. In Peter’s day, evil was compared to a lion on the prowl. In our day, evil is the suicide bomber, a Millennial of all people, someone committed to the cause not of life but of death. Well, guess what? You and I need to be more committed to life than the terrorist is to death. You and I need to believe far more passionately in Jesus Christ than the terrorist believes in his or in her religion. We need to be steadfast in our belief that Christ is our *only* defense. Oh, how I would love to believe it was simply a matter of weapons and strategy and arrests and prosecutions, but scripture tells us this is *spiritual warfare*, and spiritual warfare

is fought far differently than conventional warfare. You fight a spiritual war with spiritual weapons, and the only spiritual weapon you and I have is Whom? Jesus Christ! Christ is our *only* Defense, the only Defense that works. He is THE Lion Tamer! And on His resume there is only one accomplishment that matters to you and to me: Christ is risen, and that means Christ has defeated evil, defeated death, defeated the devil's plan to silence you and me. And here's what gives me no small amount of comfort: evil **is** defeated by faith, by you and me confessing Christ as the risen Lord. And what does that mean? That means we live each day confessing Who is in charge. It means we worship, we show up, we let it be known that we are not confiding in our own strength because that's a recipe for disaster. Our faith is in the One of God's choosing, and Who might that be? That would be Christ Jesus, Whose army of One is far superior to evil's army of many, even on the best of days.

The hard part of what Peter tells us is found in verse 6 where he says: *Humble yourself therefore under the mighty hand of God.* In other words, remember whom you are and what you can and what you cannot do. You and I, we do not possess the talent nor the power nor the smarts sufficient enough to do battle against evil. Such capability we do not possess nor have we been given. We are called to humble ourselves so we know our place, so we remember our limits, so we are under no illusion as to what evil can do and is willing to do to you and to me. The Greek word for "humble" means to get and to stay low. Keep your head down. And in getting low, we give Christ the highest visibility. If evil wants to engage anyone it won't be you and me. It will be Who? Jesus Christ! We must not engage evil. That's not our battle. The only One Who is equipped to do battle against evil is the Son of God, the One Who said "No" to evil twice: once in the wilderness and once in the resurrection, and all by the love and strength of the Father. That's not our battle! That's Christ's battle. That's a battle we don't have to fight. That battle has already been won for us,

and one day Christ will finish that battle completely, and when that day comes it will be very clear, so very clear why our *only* defense is faith in the One Whom God once chose to be our defense.

Ever since 9/11, I have heard people speak of a new reality, that you and I are living in a new day, a day of terrorism, a day when no one can assume they are safe and secure, not even in our own home. But that's not what scripture tells says. Scripture tells us that the new reality is Jesus Christ, and we are safe, matter of fact, we are blessed in bearing the sign and the seal of Jesus' Name. Hear this: the new reality isn't owned by evil. There is a new reality, but that new reality is owned by the risen and reigning Lord, Whose Name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, the Alpha and the Omega of my life and of your life and of the life of the world. The new reality is owned by the One Who was willing to spill *His* blood so our only defense would be found in Him, in His body, in His blood, and through faith in His undying love for us.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, sober us by Your Spirit if we are not taking seriously the reality of evil in this present life. Remind us, nudge us, humble us that our only defense is You, our faith that You and You alone are the victorious Lord and Saviour of life and of our very lives. Amen.