

Sermon for Trinity 21 – John 4:46-54

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Our Lord comes again to Cana in Galilee. Here He turned water to wine. This time a city official was there in Cana. Now this is a big important man. He is in charge. At least he had part of the authority in that community. Bad things don't happen to him. And yet, his son is sick. Nothing is working. And now his boy is at the point of death. His son is his hope. His son is his life. His son is his heritage. His son is his everything. Without his son he has no future and nothing else. And his son is ill, even near death.

Bad times have caused this man to despair. He has lost hope and trust in God. And Christ knew it. "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." Christ shows him the most important thing: believing. But who wouldn't lose trust in God at a time like that? Have we not also doubted God's love for us when we have money problems, loss of possessions, or sickness for ourselves or those we love? In times of trial, to whom or what have we looked to for our highest good?

Our ancient enemies battle us. They want us to seek our good outside of God. Those enemies are the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. Our sinful flesh pulls us away from God. It puts our desires above God's will. The world leads us astray down mindless and meaningless paths. And the devil. We recognize him. He's the snake with the bruised head.

We are victims of our enemies' deceit and fraud. We've believed the lies. We've eaten of their fruit. We've felt the shame they've put upon us. We are victims. This is true. But we are not helpless. For our help comes from God's Son who has conquered our enemies. Christ has crushed the head of the serpent. He has defeated temptation in our flesh. He has overcome the world so that we will too. We are not only victims. We are weapons of war against our enemies.

So stand firm and persevere. Don't be neglectful in your callings. Remain steadfast. Stand ready to defend the faith and give an answer to those who challenge the Bible's message that you know to be true. Meet their arguments. Keep God's Word in your heart. A sword hidden and sheathed can do nothing but rust. So be ready. When Satan attacks, strike back. The devil is a mighty enemy and we must be well outfitted for war.

Whatever the situation, we must do battle against the devil, who is attacking us and storming us with evil thoughts that urge us to live according to our desires, and not the way God wants us to live. Our combat is the clash between the truth and lies, the Creator and Satan. The devil intends to destroy God's rule. We must be prepared to resist our enemy. But there is comfort here for us. The conflict that we've been drawn into is not our conflict but God's. God will give us the aid and support we need against the raging and fury of the Foe. Only with God's Word can we stand firm against the evil one. God will triumph, even through our weakness.

God insures our victory over Satan's machinations. So suit up in God's armor. What sort of armor can that be? Where do we find it? Who will make it for us? God does. And he's already

clothed you with it. In baptism, God has fitted your armor. And keeping on this armor is important, so that you are able to stand against the cunning assaults of the devil. The devil will not attack you directly when he sees that you grasp the sword of God's Word. He will find the gaps into which he can sneak. For the devil appears as an angel of light, using the world's reasoning, wisdom, and cleverness to deceive. He comes as a "friend," not as an enemy. He is a shining, dazzling white devil, out to blind us with his "brilliance" us just as he deceived Eve in the garden. We can't expect an evil looking devil, clothed in black with horns, pitchfork, and tale saying, "I am Satan. Protect yourself from me." We hear of demon possession, convulsions, and other cases throughout the world and I don't doubt that the devil works in these ways. But for us, it seems, he hides himself in the places we work, study, and rest. He takes a place at our tables and in our beds. He slinks like a snake, adorning himself with God's word and name, even citing the Scriptures, as he did with our Lord. He is not only clever, subtle, and tricky, and far above human reason and wisdom; he is also vicious and devises ways to harm us day and night. He enjoys bringing us evil and misfortune and taking from us "goods, fame, child, and wife."

He wants to cause friction, discord, and resentment in our life. He wants to provoke anger, impatience, and revenge in our relationships. He wants to lead us astray in our relationships and attack our conscience by creating worry and fear.

Yet, the Word reveals his deception. So we need the proper armor of God's Word. Knives, guns, bombs, and missiles will not suffice. We need weapons from heaven. Our own flesh and blood is weak. God's Word in preaching, Holy Baptism, and the Sacrament of the Altar is strong and is our only defense.

And these we receive only in faith. For we must say: "I am a sinner. I have not lived as I should. I have done too little. But there is a Man who is holy. There is a Man who has given Himself for me. He died for me. He has been given for me by His Father. His righteousness and holiness belong to me. He stands in my place. For this reason I have peace. For this reason there is no accusations allowed against me. I will do as much as I can in my obligations for others. But seeing as I always come up lacking and inconsistent, Christ will help me and preserve me. On Him alone I rely. In Him alone I have confidence to stand against every evil power and the gate of hell. God grant that I remain steadfast in Him!" So hold Christ in front of the devil's nose and silence his accusations. All the hardship that he can bring us in this world can never deprive us of our eternal life in Christ.

For we also, in similar fashion to that Galilean official, need signs and wonders to believe. God grants us His signs of Holy Baptism and His body and blood in His Sacrament to dispel our doubts. The official believed Christ's promise of his son's restoration before he saw him. We believe His promise of everlasting life, though unseen by our eyes. And our trust is also in the Son. The Son of our Father. The Son is our hope. The Son is our life. The Son is our heritage. The Son is our future. To Him be glory forever. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠