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# REFORMATION SUNDAY

OCTOBER 27, 2013

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## WHEN SOMEONE STRONGER ATTACKS

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### **Luke 11:22**

**22** ...but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil

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A certain king had three sons. He wasn't sure which of them should be king after him. So, he decided to send all three of them on a quest – a very noble quest – a quest to clean out the royal stables. This was quite a challenge, because the king owned 3000 horses. He had three gigantic stables. Each stable held 1000 horses. Each son was sent to clean one of the gigantic stables. The son who could get his stable clean in one day would be named the next king.

On the first day, the first son hired workers and worked hard alongside them, but they were able to clean only half of the stable. On the second day, the second son hired better workers and worked even harder alongside them, but they were able to clean only 2/3 of the stable. On the third day, the third son began to clean his stable by himself. When it suddenly dawned on him. He ran from the stable back to his father. And he said, "Father, will you clean the stable for me?" The king said, "Yes, I will." As they walked to the stable, the king explained to his son that there was a dammed up lake behind the stable. When they got to the stable, the king swung open the doors on either end of the stable. Then, the king walked to the dam, opened the floodgates, and the water rushed forth. The water shot right through the stable, and in a moment the entire stable was completely clean.

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Now, if I ask you here at church which son was credited with completing the quest, you have no problem saying it was the youngest son. Now, you know that he did not complete the quest. He did not clean the stable, just as you can't clean your own conscience. The youngest son can't even take credit for coming to his father and asking him to clean the stable for him. Because he didn't figure it out. The idea simply and miraculously dawned on him, the way that faith in Jesus happens in us miraculously.

As Martin Luther said in the meaning to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him..." So, if I ask you here at church which son was credited with completing the quest, you have no problem saying it was the youngest son. Because that's what we have been taught from the Scriptures. "God's righteousness is credited to us through our faith." "We are justified by His grace as a gift." "By grace are you saved through faith and even that is not of yourselves so that no one can boast." In other words, we have eternal life, we get the crown of eternal life by God's grace, by His unearned love, through faith in Christ. You have no problem saying these things here at church. It's when you're at work, or at school, or at home, or with your family, or when you suddenly remember a painful or embarrassing failure, that you have difficulty applying the message of the youngest son to yourself and to others.

Because in the everyday world, there is a different message that is preached. It sounds Biblical. It says that it is your Christian duty to achieve your fullest potential – your utmost for His highest. Bible passages are even pulled out of context and used to support this way of thinking. Like, "To whom much is given, much shall be required." "You reap what you sow." In this way of thinking, to do your best at whatever task God calls you to do, no matter how lowly the task may be, is not good enough. You must always be striving to be successful. To have the kind of job or profession that fully uses your talents. You must always strive to be the best, to be perfect and to not make mistakes. For then God will bless you with the fruits of your labors.

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The devil loves that kind of thinking. He loves to twist God's Word to make it say something that it doesn't. The devil loves it when we think that the Christian life is GOD RESPONDS TO WHAT WE DO. If we work to our fullest potential, then God will grant us success. If we try hard enough, we will not make mistakes. The devil loves that thinking, because we will make mistakes, and when we do the devil can accuse us of not trying hard enough. He can accuse us of being stupid. He can accuse us of letting our priorities slip. With our focus on striving for perfection, the devil keeps bringing up those moments we failed or embarrassed ourselves. He keeps causing us to remember our mistakes. Long after everyone else has forgotten how you failed and long after you confessed it and long after God has forgiven you, you still think on those failures, they loop in your mind like that silly video you can't stop watching.

The devil loves it even more when you set the same impossible standards of perfection for the people in your life. The devil is the accuser, who, as it says in Revelation 12, accuses God's people day and night..."

Sally accused her brother John of killing Grandma's pet duck with his slingshot. But she did not tell Grandma. Later when Grandma asked Sally to help with the dishes, Sally said, "John told me that he wants to help in the kitchen more." Then she whispered to him, "Remember the duck." John did the dishes. And every time it was Sally's turn to do the dishes, she said it to him again, "Remember the duck." John was spending a lot of time in the kitchen. Finally, he talked to Grandma about the duck. She told him, "I saw it when you did it, and I forgave you. But I wondered how long you were going to let Sally make you miserable." He had been miserable, because he kept listening to his accuser. Does that feel familiar to you? The quest of shutting out the Accuser is beyond your ability.

But that dirty Accuser, the devil, is no match for your King. As someone has said, "We are at war with a very powerful enemy. But we are at peace with a far more powerful God." Jesus compared the devil to a strong man, fully armed, guarding his house, his possessions safe. Then Jesus says in the very next verse, "When someone stronger attacks the strong man and overpowers him, then the stronger man takes away the strong man's armor..." He didn't say "if." He said "when."

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The stronger man did attack the devil. Jesus went to war with the devil on your behalf. Jesus went after the devil with a hammer. The devil was defeated by the hammering and nailing of Jesus' hands and feet to a cross. Jesus defeated the devil when He willingly gave His life on a cross for your failures and embarrassments.

That cross is the focus of our jobs, our goals, of whatever it is we are called to do at work, at home, at school, with our family, with others. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS NOT GOD RESPONDS TO WHAT WE DO. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS OUR RESPONSE TO WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US at the cross and is doing for us. It's a Gospel life. It's a life of being forgiven for our failures. And of being enabled to forgive ourselves. Not just at church but at home and at work and in here where we do our thinking – so that we're able to live our lives in joyful response to the cross.

During the early days of the Civil War a Union soldier was arrested on charges of desertion. He was condemned and sentenced to death. He appealed, and the appeal eventually landed on the desk of the president. President Lincoln felt mercy for the soldier and signed his pardon. That soldier returned to service, fought the entirety of the war, and was killed in the last battle. Found within his breast pocket was the thing that had become the new focus of his life, that had given him courage, that enabled to see himself differently. What was in his breast pocket? The signed pardon from the president.

Your signed pardon, your forgiveness is the cross of your crucified King. It goes with you wherever you, not just at church but out there on the battlegrounds wherever the devil tries to get you to think less of yourself. That cross tells you your sins are forgiven. Your conscience, like the youngest son's stable, is clean. And yes, your King is willing to help you with that, to help you remember that every day.

Amen