

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA
The First Sunday of Lent: February 26, 2023
“Counsel for the Devil”
Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on this first Sunday of Lent. Since Lent is about facing your fears, and also, about returning to God, I would like to take my sermon time to preach about the devil. Yes, the devil. Not from the Gospel, Bible thumping, “get behind me Satan” stance; but let’s talk about the devil and his coping skills.

Hey, I talk a lot. It’s got to be interesting at least some of time. We love to read the story of creation and Adam and Eve. Generations have blamed the original sin on a variety of things, and if you were in our catechism class, you now know there are no answers to these very lofty questions. So here is my take, as if I were the chaplain to the Devil.

How are you doing today Mr. Satan?

“Well, I’m trying to make a comeback you know. But I keep having this reoccurring dream. I remember when I loved the company of the lady in the garden, made her wise, she listened to my counsel. I took that beautiful world God created, and made it mine. It was mine. And then…”

The Devil fidgets in his chair, lowers his gaze, bows his head and says, “and then He came. Damn it.” He then sits back up and states, “I’m going to lose it. In the end, I will be dust.”

The Devil then continues his journey of grief. He tells of his first denial with the Christ child, on and on about how God got Jesus out of danger and into Egypt. He killed so many, but not the one intended. He

admitted he knew his time was limited, he could see the end, but at that time, he stayed in denial.

Then Jesus was baptized. Well, Mr. Satan had a difficult time with that one, so he got angry, very angry. He got so angry that he followed Jesus into the wilderness and began the bargaining process. Please note, he was very emotional during this discussion. He had anger on his side, and he was good at tempting people. *“Got that woman after all.”*

But I could see, as I assessed him, that he was still struggling with the idea that his bargaining phase had ended up in failure. I could tell he was trying to distance himself from the whole situation, as he described how stoic and unbending he was when (and then there was that tell-tale sign - his body language - he bowed his head) he stated, *“That One, refused my offers.”*

“I offered bread, food for the body, to keep the body alive, to enjoy the taste, the texture, the simple bodily satisfaction.” And as the devil continued, I could see the pressure rise as his voice started to constrict.

“So, then I got mad, but was trying to play it cool. I really wanted to push Him off that pinnacle. I should have pushed Him off that pinnacle, but that wasn’t the point, was it. It was the offer of immortality, to fly, to be super human, and to manipulate God the Father to intervene in a directed way. To do an action that is not in God’s plans for you – to test God.”

By now the devil began to lower his shoulders and explain that the power trip didn’t work either. *“How do you blackmail the Son of God, when you can’t get an in? I tried,”* he began to plead. *“I tried. I tempted*

the body – with starvation- with mortality, I tempted the mind, to think one could manipulate God. I really tried, and then of course, I had to go for it. I tried to sell his – oops, sorry.” As the devil said the word "His" again, his head bowed and he finished, *“sell His soul for power.”*

And with that last statement the Devil lowered his shoulders and the next stage of grief was easily identifiable - the depression. He described it as feeling empty, and having the world around him feel empty. He didn't want to continue, but I edged him on.

“Ah,” the devil said, *“I know where you want to go with this, the cross. Right, that's what everybody is always talking about. The sacrifice, the resurrection, the everlasting life, a loving community. Well, I still have severe PTSD over that one. We will talk about that at another time, right now, I want to get on to a place where I can just accept - I can't win them all. What if everyone starts to act like,”* his head bows, *“Him, you know, Him.*

As most of you know who have counseled with me, I accept that I am not responsible for your lives. Most of you already know the right thing to do. So, I either listen or tell you some kind of version of the truth as I see it. So, in counseling Mr. Satan, I cannot change the chaplain that I am. So, I listened and then gave response.

Devil, if I may use that term. I feel you are on a journey of grief; I know this because human kind has been on this journey of grief since you showed up. You, yes you, are also a creature of God, and yes as a creature of God you can be refuted, ignored, and denied. I am not sure

your reign qualifies for hospice yet, as people still struggle with the original wisdom that was contained in the garden.

But Jesus **denies** you for **us**. Jesus **strengthens us** when you throw things our way that would have us behave badly. And frankly, sir, your most creative move is your ability to take away hope. Maybe it is **you** who should reflect a bit this Lenten season, and maybe return to God.

Please know, sir, that I have heard you. And your struggles might actually be because of you yourself. So, as a creature of God I know these words apply to you also:

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’

Amen