
WHEN THE DEVIL SHOWS UP

Do you know what the emergent generation is?

- Emergents simply are those who are under the age of 30.

Generally, when it comes to going to church, relationships are more important to emergents than the teachings and practices of churches.

- Emergents are looking for places where they can belong, where they will be accepted and included, and have friendships.
 - And they are especially interested in understanding GOD's and JESUS' relationship with people.

I love the questions of emergent folks, though a lot of pastors I know don't.

- Their questions challenge you to go to places where theology doesn't always have nice pat answers.

Let me give you an example that came from Brandy, my daughter Rebekah's best friend in high school.

- (Let me add that Brandy permitted me to share this.)

This was Brandy's question: "Shouldn't we as Christians pray for the salvation of the devil?"

- Isn't that a great question?!
 - Theologically, that question is, "Can the devil be saved?"
 - But relationally, that question is, "Shouldn't we pray for the salvation of even really bad people?"

Of course, as Christians, we are to pray for the salvation of everyone.

- But how many of us would even think about praying for the salvation of the fallen angels, demons, or even the devil?
 - In part, this is because we assume that the fate of these beings was determined when they were cast out of heaven.
 - Another reason is because we don't think of these beings in human terms.
 - Today's gospel, though, points out the fact that when we least expect it the devil can show up.

I think it's worth noting that there are two examples of the power of GOD in this reading, although both refer to that power as "authority."

First, it says that JESUS taught as ONE who had authority, and it clarifies that by announcing HE spoke "*not as a teacher of the law.*"

- The Jewish teachers of the day taught by quoting the rabbis and teachers of previous generations.
- The teachings of JESUS, however, were as ONE who had the insights HIMSELF, insights of heaven itself.

Second, JESUS had authority not just to teach, but authority over evil spirits, too.

- A man came to the synagogue, possessed by an evil spirit—a demon.
 - When JESUS casts it out, HIS authority and power are recognized, power over the forces of evil.
 - That's the authority of JESUS, the power of GOD.

Does it surprise you that an evil spirit comes to the synagogue?

- Does it surprise you that even the devil goes to church?

A man came to the church I was serving fifteen or so years ago and said to me, "I want you to pray for me."

- When I asked him, what was the need for which he wanted me to pray, he said, "I think I'm the antichrist."
 - I told to him, "I will pray for you, but first, I want you to know that you are not the antichrist."
 - He asked me, "How do you know?"
 - I answered, "The antichrist wouldn't come to a Christian church and ask to be prayed for."
- We prayed, and then he said, "Nobody ever took the time to talk to me. Other churches just told me to see a psychiatrist or get some medication, or they just told me to leave."
- We did talk about his situation and the clear need for him to start taking his medication again.

So, maybe Brandy's question helped me because I was praying for the antichrist—another identity for the devil.

- As Christians, shouldn't we pray for everyone?

This gospel story today also serves as a reminder in fact of the devil in our midst.

The devil is subtle and sneaky—the lord of lies.

- We may not even be aware of the devil at work.
- But be assured the devil looks for ways to block the work of GOD's Kingdom, and here are a few truths to keep in mind:
 - 1) If the devil can't make you bad then he'll make you busy, too busy to think about GOD or to do GOD's will.
 - Perhaps you know folks like that—people who are so heavenly-minded that they're of no earthly good:
 - too busy to think about GOD or to do what GOD needs them to do;
 - too busy with church work to serve those outside the church;
 - too busy with prayer and study to serve even those inside the church.
 - 2) A house divided against itself cannot stand.
 - Satan is always looking for ways to create division within the house of GOD.
 - Focusing on the differences between denominations rather than focusing on our shared mission for GOD's Kingdom can cause us to lose our focus on JESUS CHRIST.
 - Disagreements between church members without seeking to understand each other.
 - Too often the need to have our own way can lead us to forget to focus on GOD's will.

3) Judgment instead of grace.

- When we spend time making decisions about who can be in and who can't, whether it be the Kingdom or the congregation, we are playing GOD, and that, Christians, is doing the devil's work.

GOD's grace is GOD's unconditional love given through faith in CHRIST.

- This is the most powerful force in the world for changing people's lives—JESUS power!
 - It is through this power that we can cast out the demons and banish the devil.
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A few years ago, I met a man who asked me to pray for him.

- As I prayed, he began to weep and told me of the terrible things he had done in his life.
 - Believe me, this was not the kind of person some churches would want in their community.
 - As I assured him that there wasn't anything he had done that GOD could not forgive, his weeping became more profound.
 - I held him and suddenly his weeping stopped.
 - He looked at me and asked, "Is that really true?"
 - I told him that JESUS had died to free him from his past sins, and he suddenly smiled.
 - It was as though the demon of guilt and shame had been cast out.
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You may not expect to ever face the devil.

- You may even doubt the real existence of the devil.

But today's gospel reading reminds us that the devil will find his way into people's lives to control them and twist them away from GOD.

- The devil doesn't want you here.
- The devil wants you out there...lost.
 - And there are many who through poor choices or evil circumstances have found themselves under the control of the devil.

So, JESUS sends us,

- to act in love,
 - to speak a word of grace,
 - to announce the good news that the Kingdom of GOD is at hand,
 - not just in the world, but in their very lives.
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It is important to know that the devil will show up.

- In fact, it is when we are the closest to doing something good for the kingdom of GOD that the devil is most likely to act,
 - so, we must constantly be on guard and stand ready to respond.
 - Study GOD's word so that you know GOD's truth.
 - Watch for those things that can distract or divide.
 - Always ask if you are seeking to follow your will or GOD's will.
 - And rely on GOD's grace that has freed you and can free others as well.
 - These are the tools that can help us when the devil shows up.
 - They provide the power to cast out demons and defeat the devil.
 - And they are the resources GOD provides to help to bring about the Kingdom of GOD.