

Matthew 16:21-23

Many people are looking forward to Wednesday, November 5th because when that day comes, all of the political ads which we see over and over again will disappear from our television screens. After Election Day the attacks, and rebukes, and slams will finally come to an end...although, for another nine weeks we will simply have to grin and bear it, because no matter where you look, those negative ads are staring you in the face.

Yet, I doubt if any political ad in our day has ever reached the level of rebuke which we see in our text for today. Jesus was not running for any kind of political office, but the negative words that He spoke to Peter, had they been recorded, would have made headline news on ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX. “Get behind Me, Satan!” He told him. Can you imagine Mr. McCain or Mr. Obama calling their opponent the devil? They would never stoop to such a level. And yet Jesus uses these very words. He didn’t say, “Peter, please leave Me alone!” or “Get away from Me, Peter!” or even “Peter, shut up!” Jesus flat out, to Peter’s face, said, “Get behind Me, Satan!” No harsher words have ever been spoken.

Well Peter, we might think, must have had it coming. He must have first said something to Jesus that was so negative, so mean, so downright cruel, that Jesus had no choice but to harshly rebuke him for it. Yet, nothing of the kind came from Peter’s mouth. Rather, Peter spoke to Jesus words of love; words which expressed his care and concern. Not mean, not cruel—Peter was simply doing what he thought was best. He had noble intentions. He was watching out for his dear Friend. Jesus had told His disciples that He must go up to Jerusalem, and that He must suffer there at the hands of the Chief Priests, and Scribes, and Elders, and that He must be killed...and Peter, from a caring heart, said, “No!” “No Jesus, this will never happen to you!” And what does Peter get for showing such concern? “Get behind Me, Satan!”

But before we raise our eyebrows at Jesus, let’s look closer at what Peter was saying here. With his words Peter was playing “god.” He was telling Jesus what was best for Him. “Not your will, Jesus, but mine be done.” Jesus was the Master, but here on this day Peter was trying to master Jesus. He was saying, “I am lord and master; Jesus, you must listen to me and do what I say.”

Are we ever guilty of this? Most certainly...whenever we tell God how He must handle a certain situation in our life. That He must make our loved one well. That He must remove the stress from our life. That He must fix the troubles we caused and do it our way. And when things don’t go our way; when God fails to answer our prayer according to our will, we become angry with Him and think He has abandoned us.

Yet, what if Jesus had listened to Peter? What if He had told Peter, “Okay, we’ll do it your way. I won’t go up to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Okay Peter, your will be done?” Well then, you and I would have no Savior. You and I would have to bear our own punishment for our sins. We could not ever pray, “Forgive me for Jesus’ sake,” for Jesus would have done nothing for us. Satan would have an eternal claim on each one of us. Upon our death we would be entering hell, and you and I would be there forever—had Jesus done things Peter’s way.

Noble intentions though they were, what Peter was demanding from Jesus was the worst thing that could ever happen. Peter's heart may have been in the right place, but he was nonetheless, a tool of Satan, for the devil himself was using Peter to prevent Jesus from becoming your Savior.

Jesus was not fooled by the love dripping off of Peter's words. He recognized them as Satan's temptation. Immediately He rebuked Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" These words may sound harsh, but no lovelier words have ever been spoken. Out of love for you He said them. Because of the great compassion Jesus has in His heart for you He rebuked Peter to his face. Nothing would prevent Him from becoming your Savior. Nothing would stand in the way of His cross. He must go there for you. He must suffer there for you. He must die your death. He must be punished severely to pay the price of your sinfulness. He must endure hell in your place. And so from Jesus' mouth came these beautiful, lovely words, "Get behind Me, Satan!"

I wonder...when the devil comes after us, which words do we use against him? Satan did not prevent Jesus from going to the cross for you, and so now he's after you. He focuses his attacks on you. Satan cannot tempt Jesus anymore, and so he tempts you and me—to wander away from Jesus, to seek first the things of the world, to take our eyes off of Christ's Word and Sacraments.

And when temptations come our way, often instead of "Get behind me, Satan!" we say, "Satan, keep it coming! Stay in front of me, Satan, because it's much more fun to live for this world than to live as a Christian." It's true. Instead of walking with Jesus, we prefer to run with the devil. We enjoy breaking God's commandments...just a little bit day after day. We don't like to fix our eyes on Jesus. We prefer to fix them on whatever pleases us. "Get behind me, Satan?" I don't think we use these words very often. After all, this world isn't such a bad place. Taking care of business, pursuing my hobbies, having my fun, and putting in Jesus every now and then isn't such a bad way to live, is it?

Yet, even Peter's words sounded good and noble. Satan tempted Jesus not with ugliness, but with beauty, using the compassion of a dear friend. Don't be fooled, Christian! The devil won't come after you with the worst, but with the best. He tempts you to forsake your Savior not with wretched enemies like Judas, but using dear friends like Peter.

Now the following words may sound rather odd, but hear me out. When you and I are tempted to do wrong; when we're tempted to go the way of this sinful world, we cannot say—no matter how much we think that we should—the words, "Get behind me, Satan!" You and I cannot, dare not say these words. Why should Satan listen to us? Why should he obey us? We are not his master. We have not conquered him. "Get behind me, Satan?" He would only laugh at us were we to give him such a command. Who do we think we are?

Jesus can say these words; not us. Jesus he must listen to; not us. Jesus conquered the devil; we didn't. Jesus is Lord and Master; we are not. Don't ever think you can tell Satan what to do or where to go. You can't defeat him. You cannot put him in his place. But Jesus already has for you. When temptations come, don't yell at Satan, run to Christ. That's where we need to be, always. Is Satan in front of you? Do not fear. Jesus is with you. The devil may laugh at you, but he must obey your Savior. That's why Jesus urges

you to be in His House every single Sunday morning; to be at His Table every time His Supper is given; to be in His Word every single day—because we're no match for Satan. On our own we will lose every time. But with Christ with you in His Word and Sacraments, Satan has no choice but to get behind you. He will not obey you, but he must obey Christ who is with you and for you.

Jesus knows how weak you are. He knows how we struggle with temptation. He knows that we often give in. But Jesus forgives you. He forgives you for running with the devil. He forgives you for going the way of the sinful world. He will never abandon you. That's why He draws you here to His Word and Sacraments—so that He will, day after day, through them fight and conquer the devil for you in your life.

You see, every time you come here; every time you open the Word of God; every time you receive the Sacrament of Jesus' flesh and blood; every time you hear the words of absolution—that you, dear child of God, are forgiven for all of your sins for Jesus' sake—every time Jesus, not you...Jesus is rebuking the devil. Jesus is speaking for you the words, "Get behind Me, Satan!" Amen.