

“Unwitting Servants of Satan”
2 Corinthians 11:1-15
June 24, 2018
Faith Presbyterian Church – Evening Service
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We’re returning to Second Corinthians tonight. We have made it to chapter eleven. 2 Corinthians 11:1-12:13 is often known as Paul’s “Fool’s Speech” as he argues further against his accusers, the false apostles whom he ironically calls the “Super Apostles.” We’ll look at the first 15 verses of that tonight.

And so please listen carefully to 2 Corinthians 11:1-15 – this is God’s word for us tonight.

The Apostle Paul writes:

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! ²For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ³But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. ⁵Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. ⁶Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

⁷Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God’s gospel to you free of charge? ⁸I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. ⁹And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. ¹⁰As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. ¹¹And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

¹²And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. ¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

This is God’s Word.

As always seems to be the case in our texts from Second Corinthians, a lot is going on in this passage. Paul here is tying together a number of topics he hit on earlier on this letter.

In the first paragraph of our text one theme that comes up is how Paul’s gospel and vision of Jesus differs from that of the false teachers in Corinth. In January 2016 we looked at 2 Corinthians 4 and talked about the relationship between glory and the cross that was present in Paul’s gospel, but that was minimized or even absent in the presentation of the false teachers.

In the second paragraph Paul deals again with the Corinthians’ suspicion that he doesn’t really love them, which we saw come up in chapter one of this letter back in July 2015.

So themes from earlier in the letter are coming together in this passage. More specifically, they are combining in connection to what the false teachers are doing, and connecting to the question of whom those false teachers really serve.

In the beginning of our passage Paul warns the Corinthians of the danger posed by the devil, as he reminds them of the story of the deception of Eve. At the end of our passage Paul asserts that the false teachers in Corinth are actually servants of Satan. We're going to consider tonight how that theme fits in with everything else in our text.

What does it mean that these teachers in Corinth were servants of Satan? And even if they were, what does that have to do with us?

To help us think about that, I want to start with a story tonight.

But before that, I have to kind of apologize. It's a story from the 1960s show *The Twilight Zone*. Most of you know I enjoy some forms of science fiction ... but I try to regulate how often those stories come up in my sermons. And my last *Twilight Zone* story was a healthy two years ago, while the one before it was four years ago. So I'm spacing them out.

But, that said, the last time I preached on 2 Corinthians I told a story from *Doctor Who* ... which is also sci-fi. So ... I'm sorry. Bear with me (as Paul says) – I don't think it will be too out there tonight ...

The episode is called "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street." It aired in 1960 and was written by Rod Serling.

The story takes place on a typical early 1960s suburban street called Maple Street on a late Saturday afternoon. People are working in the yard, kids are playing, people are going about their business, when at 6:43 PM there is a bright flash of light in the sky. People wonder what it was, but assume it's nothing to worry about.

But shortly after the flash, everyone on Maple Street has their power go out. Then, when they go to make a phone call, they find that the phones aren't working either. They start talking in the street about it. They're confused, because it's a beautiful sunny day out. One person tries to get a news update on a portable radio, but that's not working either. So, one man decides to drive in to town to see what is going on. But when he tries to, his car won't start. Soon they find that no one's car will start. And now people start to get confused and concerned.

Two men, Steve and Charlie, decide to walk into town to find out what is going on there. As they begin to walk away, a fourteen-year-old boy, Tommy, calls out to them:

"Mr. Brand..." he says, "you better not!"

"Why not?" asks Steve.

"They don't want you to," replies Tommy.

When Steve asks what Tommy means, Tommy shares his conviction that the flash of light overhead was an alien spaceship and that those on board were causing the outages and that they don't want anyone to leave. He earnestly explains to everyone that that's how it always happens in the stories he's read about what an alien invasion would be like.

The people respond with incredulity and a little annoyance.

Steve gently explains to Tommy that they'll go to town and he'll see that it's not anything as crazy as aliens. They turn and start to walk away, when Tommy calls out again.

"Mr. Brand...please don't leave here," he cries out. Everyone is getting more uncomfortable. "You might not even be able to get to town," he says. "It was that way in the story. Nobody could leave. Nobody except [...] except the people they'd sent down ahead of them. They looked just like humans. And it wasn't until the ship landed that [...]" Self-conscious, he stops, but a few adults encourage him to continue. "That was the way they prepared things for the landing." He says. "They sent four people. A mother and a father and two kids who looked just like humans...but they weren't."

Now everyone gets weirdly quiet. One man makes a joke, and people laugh ... but it seems like a nervous laugh, and they look at each other uneasily as they make it.

Just then, the car of one man, named Les, suddenly starts on its own in his driveway. The group stares, and begins asking questions. Why does *his* car start? Why does *his* work when no one else's does? As they murmur among themselves, one man comments on how he noticed that Les didn't seem surprised or concerned about the flash of light in the sky earlier ... as if he wasn't surprised. People want to know what is going on with Les, and the group rushes over to his house. As they get there, the car suddenly turns off. Les is standing there, looking at his car, confused. The people, though, are more focused on him. They start to question him. As they do, the car starts again, and their questions get more frantic. One woman notes how she has looked out her window in the middle of the night and seen Les standing outside, staring at the sky "as if he were waiting for someone ... as if he were looking for something," she says. Les begins to get angry over the questions and suspicions he is receiving.

It's getting dark now, and people begin to take posts standing around Les's property, watching him. Steve urges everyone to stop keeping watch. He tells them this is crazy. He urges them to leave Les alone.

But as he does, people begin to turn on him. One person comments on how they heard that Steve has been building a radio in his basement. Charlie, who earlier had taken the lead in accusing Les, now begins to accuse Steve. "What kind of 'radio set' you workin' on?" he demands to know. "I never seen it. Neither has anyone else. Who do you talk to on that radio set? And who talks to you?"

Steve looks at him with frustration. "I'm surprised at you, Charlie. How come you're so dense all of a sudden? Who do I talk to? I talk to monsters from outer space. I talk to three headed green men who fly over here in what look like meteors."

Charlie responds to Steve's sarcasm with further accusations.

The argument continues and gets more and more heated when they suddenly hear footsteps in the distance. Everyone gets quiet and huddles together. They see an outline of a man, in the dark, at the end of the street, slowly, walking towards them. They begin to panic. Tommy blurts out that it must be the monster. A man runs and grabs his shotgun from his house. Steve takes the gun away

from him and asks what on earth he thinks he's doing. Then Charlie grabs the gun from Steve, points it at the figure, and shoots. The figure collapses. The crowd runs to see who it is. It's Peter Van Horn, their neighbor. He's dead. He had walked down the street to see what was going on with the power on other streets.

Charlie panics over what he has done. He begins to defend himself, and then suddenly the lights to his house go back on. Everyone else's are still out. People begin to accuse Charlie. They ask if Pete Van Horn had information on Charlie. They ask whether Charlie is the monster from outer space, and if Charlie shot Peter to keep him from telling everyone else.

Everyone turns on Charlie, and as they do he declares that it's Tommy, the 14-year-old, who is the monster. Then the lights go on at someone else's house. The scene descends into chaos. Each person is accusing someone else of being the monster – the threat to everyone there. As the accusations fly, people run home to grab guns or bricks or rocks.

The camera looks down on Maple Street. People are running all over the street, as we hear screaming and yelling and breaking windows and even gun shots. The street has become a war zone.

The camera shot zooms out further and further, until we see, standing on a hillside, looking down on the street, two beings standing under a flying saucer, one of them holding an electronic device.

“Understand the procedure now?” asks the first one. “Just stop a few of their machines and radios and telephones and lawn mowers...throw them into darkness for a few hours and then you just sit back and watch the pattern.”

“And this pattern is always the same?” asks the second being.

“With few variations,” says the first. “They pick the most dangerous enemy they can find...and it's themselves. And all we need do is sit back...and watch.”

“Then I take it this place...this Maple Street...is not unique,” asks the second.

The first shakes his head. “By no means,” he says. “Their world is full of Maple Streets. And we'll go from one to the other and let them destroy themselves. One to the other...one to the other...one to the other.”

And they reboard their flying saucer and fly off.

What we see in the story is how the beings in the flying saucer made the residents of Maple Street their unwitting servants, the means to the end of their own destruction. And they did this by guiding them in such a way that their confusion and doubts were redirected as exaggerated false accusations against those around them.

In our text tonight, Paul is warning that the same thing is going on in the Corinthian church. First, he warns them that Satan is tempting the people of the Corinthian church – he does this in verse three by comparing the situation they are in with the story of the serpent and Eve.

And how is Satan tempting them, since no talking serpent has shown up in Corinth? In verse 15 Paul tells them that it is through the false teachers.

A few questions flow from this, though.

First, do the false teachers think of themselves as servants of Satan? Do they know whom they serve and their claim to be Christians is just a front – a lie, a marketing technique?

We don't know for sure, of course, but there's no reason to think that these teachers that Paul was referring to were intentionally serving Satan – that they had made a decision to do that. It would seem that they were *unintentional* servants of Satan.

But that leads to a second question that emerges, which is: How were they serving Satan?

Satan of course attacks people in a variety of ways. He tempts them with sinful pleasure, he tries to deceive them, he tries to direct persecution towards them, just to name a few. Is this what the false teachers are primarily doing?

Well, N.T. Wright, commenting on this passage, helpfully reminds us that another important role that Satan plays is that he is the accuser. He is the one who accuses God's people. Sometimes he uses the truth to accuse them, but other times he is happy to use lies to accuse them.

And isn't this exactly the problem Paul is dealing with in this portion of Second Corinthians? Paul is having to deal with the fact that the false teachers are heaping accusations on him.

In our text tonight alone, we see that they have accused him of having inferior authority, in verse five; of having inferior speaking abilities, in verse six; of having some sinister and selfish motive in not accepting payment from the Corinthian church, in verses seven and eight; and of not loving the Corinthians in verse eleven. Accusation, upon accusation, upon accusation, and that's just in this short passage. The letter has already had many more.

And so, back to our second question: *How* are these false apostles serving Satan? It is in his work as the accuser. They are serving as his proxy-accusers.

And it's worth noting the form of their accusations. We might call them exaggerated false accusations. They find some small point of disagreement or confusion, they interpret it as suspiciously as possible, they try to inflate it with as many sinister motives as they can read into it, and then they present the results as an accusation. So Paul's decision not to receive payment is interpreted suspiciously, it's re-interpreted as a slap in the face, rather than the gift it was intended to be, then motives are speculated about until we get to the conclusion of verse 11: Paul does not love the Corinthian church. That is how they build an exaggerated false accusations.

It's the same pattern we saw in the *Twilight Zone* episode on Maple Street. An oddity, an unexplained happening, a quirk – whether a car starting, a man who likes to star-gaze, or another who likes to build ham radios – each thing is interpreted as suspiciously as possible. Sinister motives are read into it. And suddenly the man is suspected of being a monster.

We see this pattern around us, don't we – this pattern of suspicion and this tendency towards exaggerated false accusations? It fills our public discourse, and far too often our personal relationships.

But before we get too into that, I want to say two other things.

First, I want to clarify how this idea of exaggerated false accusation fits into the topic of real and necessary accusations.

None of what we see in this text, or what I have to say tonight, goes against what we discussed this morning about our calling to confront sin. The warning we find here about exaggerated false accusations, understood rightly, is not even in tension with the call to uproot sin, rather than shelter it.

Actually, the two concepts go together quite well. They actually sort of need each other.

The problem with exaggerated false accusations is not that it is a good thing over-done – it is not too much vigilance, or taking sin too seriously. The problem is that it is misdirected suspicion that actually leaves one open to real attacks and predators, and that often neglects the real things threatening a community.

On Maple Street, there was a real enemy – the creatures from the flying saucers. The people's false accusations were not just wrong in themselves, they were actually a diversion from the real threat: the figures from the saucer.

In Corinth, the false accusations against Paul are not only wrong in themselves – but they distract the people from the real threat, which is the false teachers. Paul points out that they not only are wary of them, but at the same time, he says in verse four that they tolerate the false apostles quite well. Their accusatory attitude towards an ally keeps them from recognizing the true threat.

And so it is with us. False accusations, more often than not, are a diversion from the real issue. We go to war with each other over exaggerated false accusations over inconsequential things, while tolerating the real sin and rot in our lives or our institutions. And the devil is quite pleased when he can get us to do this.

And so ... far from reducing our war on sin, turning from false accusations is a necessary step in fighting the real threats we face.

So ... we see negatively the danger of giving in to false accusations – of following the example of Maple Street – of becoming unwitting servants of Satan.

How then do we combat that tendency?

We might be helped here by looking to Paul. If we look at Paul, instead of the naïve embrace of exaggerated false accusations we see in the Corinthians, we see Paul anticipating and preemptively guarding himself against the temptations of the Accuser.

I think we see something of this in verses seven through eleven.

As we look at Paul's refusal to receive money from the Corinthians, we probably find ourselves confused. What's going on with that? Did Paul think it was wrong for pastors to be paid? Well ... no. Elsewhere he strongly argues that ministers should be provided for financially by those they serve. Well then ... was it a pride thing? It doesn't seem to be ... when Paul speaks of "boasting" he means something like confidence, not pride ... and elsewhere Paul seems to know his own pride well enough to notice if his actions here were motivated by pride. What is it then? Why won't he accept payment for his work in Corinth?

Ultimately, an answer is not spelled out for us. But I don't think it's that hard to see why that policy may have been a wise one for Paul.

First, N. T. Wright points out that Paul may have enacted this policy to prevent anyone from falsely accusing him of trying to get rich by preaching the gospel. [Wright, 117] As a traveling preacher, Paul may have been more vulnerable to such accusation than a local pastor would be. And so it seems plausible that Paul anticipates that possibility, and preemptively guards against it.

Second, I might add that Paul may have realized himself that *he'd* be tempted to accuse those he ministered to over how well they supported him financially while he served them. Paul knew he had a past where he cared far too much about what people thought of him. And money is an all-too-typical way in which people assess how much they are valued. Maybe Paul knew his own vulnerability to how he would accuse a church in his heart if they failed to support him generously while he was there, and so, again, anticipating his own vulnerability to exaggerated false accusation, Paul may have foregone receiving pay altogether.

As a third possibility, Wright also suggests that Paul may have been concerned that if an individual supported him, he would feel beholden to them. Either they might be tempted to accuse Paul of betraying them if Paul taught something they didn't like, or Paul might have accusingly suspected them of supporting him in order to control him. Again, if that was a concern Paul anticipated, he may have foregone such pay as a way to preemptively guard against exaggerated false accusation.

Again, we do not know exactly what Paul's motivations were in not accepting money from the Corinthians. I suspect there were reasons beyond preemptively guarding against exaggerated false accusations. But I also suspect that guarding against such things was one of the motivations.

Paul lived his life in the full knowledge that Satan, the Accuser, was real. He knew Satan would be trying to attack him in any way he could. And he knew to anticipate those attacks and preemptively guard against the temptations they would bring.

The question is: Do we? Do we anticipate such attacks as well? Are we on guard as Paul was? Or are we naïve and vulnerable like the Corinthians ... and like the people on Maple Street?

To consider that ... let's think of where we encounter these kinds of exaggerated false accusations, and how we often respond.

One discouraging place they come up is in churches at the denominational level.

These kind of things come up in every denomination. I know the PCA more than I know others, so it's easier for me to speak about.

This past General Assembly, Mark Dalbey, the president of Covenant Theological Seminary, confronted the assembly about exaggerated false accusations being made against the seminary.

The occasion for the accusations was a conference on homosexuality and other related issues, which was being held by a PCA church in St. Louis, and which one Covenant professor was giving a talk at.

Some in the PCA declared that the real goal of this conference was to push the PCA closer to accepting homosexual practices. Accusations also emerged that Covenant Seminary had a significant role in that agenda. Accusations grew online – they grew to a point where Covenant needed to issue a clarifying statement, and Dr. Dalbey had to speak on the issue at General Assembly.

Now I'm not as well versed in the issues as some are ... but I have been interested in these topics and others on gender and sexuality for some time, so I have something of a framework for them.

From my reading and the conversations I've been a part of, it appears that both those at Covenant and their accusers agree that homosexual behavior is wrong. Both believe homosexual lust is wrong. Both believe that same-sex attraction needs to be mortified.

Where then do they disagree? From what I've seen, there are three major areas of disagreement.

First, if I'm understanding them correctly, those associated with the conference in St. Louis see sexual-attraction as a *broken* trait, but one that is not inherently sinful, so long as it is not combined with lustful thoughts or outward actions. In other words, they think of it in a way that is similar to temptation – something to be cautious of, but something that is not itself a sin if not acted upon. Those who accuse them think the attraction itself is sin, rather than something like temptation. That's the first major disagreement.

The second is what kind of language is acceptable for Christians to use to describe their same-sex attraction. And the third is the shape that celibate same-sex friendships should take for Christians with same-sex attractions.

Those are the three biggest issues as I understand them. Now ... those three issues are important. We need to talk about them and work through them. And I have my own thoughts about them.

But neither view seems to be a promotion of same-sex behaviors or lusts. And the claim that they are, that they are a way to push the PCA towards accepting homosexuality, seems, to me at least, a lot like a form of exaggerated false accusations.

Maybe I'm wrong. But maybe I'm not. Our text tonight should at least open us up to the possibility that that is going on in this debate. Maybe as accusations fly we are acting like the people on Maple Street: ignoring the real threats to the church while accusing each other of being monsters.

I might be prone to suspecting that that is what's going on because of what I've seen and heard in the past.

Because eleven years ago the big debate in the PCA was Federal Vision. War seemed to break out as many claimed that the Federal Vision was going to destroy the doctrine of justification by faith

alone. Such accusations were leveled at my pastor in St. Louis. They were also leveled at some of my favorite theologians. Now it's all died down. No one talks about it much anymore. My doctrine of justification by faith alone is still intact, as it is (as far as I can tell) for every other man I know who was accused of such things. If nothing came of it all, what happened when the fight erupted 11 years ago? It would appear that what got us there were exaggerated false accusations.

And Dr. Jack Collins, a professor at Covenant Seminary with roots in our congregation, has spoken about how the same thing happened 8 years before that, over the doctrine of creation. People claimed that the doctrine of inerrancy was at stake because of some of the views accepted in the PCA study committee report on the subject. It doesn't seem to have panned out yet. Once again: exaggerated false accusations.

These are just a few recent examples within our little denominational circle. But what do we do with this? What does our text encourage us to do? Most of us here tonight are not movers and shakers in the denomination. So what are we to do when we hear of such things – when someone shares with us in person or on Facebook about the next big theological threat? What does it look like for us to follow Paul's example in guarding against the exaggerated false accusations of Satan?

Let me suggest three things:

First, we remember that Satan can use false accusations of heresy just as easily as he can use actual heresy to attack the church. We need to be wary of both. We need to remember that both are threats. And so we need to be careful in how we approach such claims.

Second, we need to remember that Satan is actively trying to recruit us as his unintentional servants. And it's easy to enter his service without realizing it. It's easy to repeat an unsubstantiated accusation. But we need to be thoughtful about whose goals we may be serving as we do that.

Third, we need to remember that we are each called to seek *both the purity and the peace* of the church. In fact, if you are a member here, you have made a vow to do that. It's the last membership vow of the five that you took. Of course we need to be on guard against false teaching that damages the *purity* of the church. But we also need to be on guard to defend its *peace* against exaggerated false accusations.

So that is a little of what it looks like on a denominational level.

And there are some parallels in how we relate to the broader church beyond our denomination and beyond the Reformed world.

From church to church and denomination to denomination there are real differences. And they matter. There are substantive reasons why I am a Presbyterian in the PCA and not a member of the Southern Baptist Convention.

But still ... there is a tendency to let disagreements and misunderstandings between denominations turn into exaggerated false accusations.

Satan delights in the fragmentation of the modern church. And the more he can make us his unintentional servants, and sow distrust so that each denomination looks at the others with

suspicion, like the residents of Maple Street, then the happier he is, and the easier it will be for him to do damage to the Church.

But these patterns don't only apply to churches. They apply to our personal lives as well.

Because you know that with certain people you have this tendency. You have this habit, with certain people, of interpreting whatever they say and do in the worst possible light. Of speculating about the sinister motives behind what they are doing. Of assuming what their selfish goals must be for what they are doing.

I know that there are people I've struggled with doing that towards, and who I even still struggle with that towards. Do you struggle with that too ... or is it just me who has that problem?

It can become an issue in friendship and acquaintances, with co-workers or bosses, between parents and children. Far too often it rears its head in conflicts between husbands and wives.

We see a quirk, or a confusing action, or something minor we disagree with ... and before we know it we have basically decided that the other person is a monster. We act not that differently from the people on Maple Street ... and what is truly impressive is that we do it all on our own, in our heads.

Our text tonight is telling us that when we do that, we are making ourselves unwitting servants of Satan. We are offering ourselves as his instruments, whether we make accusations in our heads, spread our accusations through gossip, or declare our accusations openly.

Where do *you* struggle with this? Where is this a problem for you? And again, do you guard yourself as Paul does?

Do you consider that rather than the other person being the monster ... perhaps by your accusations it is *you* who are becoming the monster?

Do you remember that Satan's forces may be actively recruiting you in that moment when you are tempted to exaggerate something into a false accusation?

Do you remember Christ's call on your life to love others, and to stand for the truth?

Let me mention one other area for us to consider this issue.

While our text tonight applies to denominations, and relationships between denominations, and while it applies also to individuals and relationships between individuals ... in its original context, its focus is on a local church.

And as we consider our local church, we would do well to follow Paul's example, and guard our hearts against the recruitment techniques of Satan.

We have gone through some recent transitions. We are facing another one somewhere on the horizon. It's natural to be nervous. There's a lot we don't know about the future. There's a lot we can't control.

But as we see with the Corinthians, and as we see with the people on Maple Street, fear and a sense of lacking control can make us easy prey for Satan's recruitment. We find ourselves drawn towards the kind of suspicious thinking that leads to exaggerated false accusations.

We find ourselves ready to be suspicious, and ready to accuse: suspicious of the ministers, suspicious of the elders, suspicious of other leaders, suspicious of individual congregants, suspicious of groups within the congregation, and so on.

And suspicion then turns into interpreting everything in the worst light, which grows into reading motives into our skewed interpretations. And then we start to accuse. Maybe only in our hearts. But maybe also with our words. Gossip at first, then open statements.

Each of us need to recognize that in the upcoming season of our church, when we are confused by something, or worried about something, or simply disagree about something, Satan's forces will be there to try to recruit us. They will try to turn the fear, or the confusion, or the disagreement into something more. They will try to make us into accusers. They will try to get us to inflate what is actually there into something more – into an exaggerated false accusation. They will try to make us like the accusing false teachers in Corinth, or the accusing neighbors on Maple Street.

Are you anticipating that? Do you acknowledge that such temptations are coming? And are you prepared for them? Are you ready to slow your thoughts and fears down, in order to listen to the words of others, and hear that you might have misunderstood them? Are you open to the possibility that a disagreement might be real, but not a matter of life or death? Are you ready to love people who frustrate you, and work for the peace of the church, as well as its purity?

Paul appears to have prepared for the temptations toward accusations that the devil would bring his way. We are called to prepare as well. Have you?

As Christians in this time and place we face real challenges. As members of this church in this season of its life we face real challenges. We need to focus on the real challenges, and the real threats, and not let Satan recruit us into fighting those who should be our allies.

One final thought on all this. There should be an encouragement at the bottom of all this. If what we've said and drawn from 2 Corinthians 11:1-15 tonight is true, then Satan is spending a lot of energy trying to do damage to the Church.

The fact that powerful spiritual beings have devoted themselves to attacking the Church – on both the global and the local level – should remind us just what a precious and powerful gift the Church really is. She is our spiritual mother. She nurtures and cares for us. We should love her as a gift from God, and that love should help motivate us as we fight these temptations.

That's what motivated Paul. Paul put up with a lot from the church in Corinth. A lot. Why? Why did he do it?

Well, he did it to serve Christ, of course. But that wasn't all. It wasn't simply duty that drove him.

In verse 11 he seems to shout at the church at Corinth about his love for them. Paul loved the church. Because despite all its shortcomings, he also saw its beauty.

The church – whether we think of it on a denominational scale, a global scale, the interpersonal relationships within it, or our particular congregation – the church is a precious, powerful gift. And if Satan thinks she is worth attacking, we can know she is worth defending.

So let us love her and love one another, guarding against the exaggerated false accusations we are far too prone to, identifying the real threats, and lovingly working together to advance Christ's kingdom.

And as we do so, let us remember Christ's promises to his Church: that he will never leave her nor forsake her, and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

Barnett, Paul. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997.

Serling, Rod. "The Monsters are Due on Maple Street." *The Twilight Zone*. Aired March 4, 1960.

Wright, N.T. *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004.