

June 19, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Jesus Lovingly Uses His Powerful Word...

“Legion!” The disciples took a step backward as a chill ran down their spines. Jesus did not flinch. He spoke with absolute authority. The Word of God is powerful. It can call the world into existence and raise the dead. This morning we see that Jesus lovingly uses his Powerful Word to cast out demons and send out a missionary.

to cast out demons

Jesus and his disciples sailed to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. There were a good number of Jews there, but most of the people were non-Jews, gentiles. As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, he was approached by a demon-possessed man. The Bible tells us that soon after God created the world, one of the ranking angels rebelled against him. We do not know why. He is called Satan (which means enemy) or Devil (which means liar). Many other angels rebelled with him and are called demons. Don't think of hell as their home. Rather, it is their prison cell. There is no salvation for the devil and his demons. They know that they are going to suffer terrible burning pain forever, without any relief. Their only ambition is to grab ahold of as many people as they can to drag them down into hell with them.

One way that the devil torments people is by taking possession of their bodies. This is not just the stuff of horror movies. It really happens. One of my seminary professors was one of our first missionaries in Africa. He was the first one to share the good news of salvation in many regions. In one class, he got super serious as he talked about demon possession. He saw people do things that were humanly impossible. It seems that demon possession is more prevalent in places where the gospel is first entering an area. It's not surprising that Jesus met up with a number of demoniacs as they did all they could to stop him. Luke described this fellow; (:27,29), **“For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs... Many times it [the demon] had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.”** He shared his skin with demons and was helpless to stop them as they used and abused his body. He lived his nightmare in tombs surrounded by rotting corpses. He screamed at night and cut himself with stones. He was malnourished and smelled horrible. He was trapped in misery.

We do not hear many stories about demon possession. Foreign missionaries tell me that they still occur, but we usually don't see demon possession here in the United States. My theory is that the devil does not need to take possession of people's bodies here in our country, because he already controls most people's hearts. A Barna survey from over 10 years ago found that, even among those who call themselves Christian, 60% agreed that, **“Satan is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.”** If a majority of so-called Christians in America do not believe the devil exists, then they are not on the lookout for him. Why would the devil blow his cover? Meanwhile,

immorality and perversion is being pushed at us and we are attacked if we speak against it even though we are trying to help people. Pornography is rampant and just a few clicks away with any phone or computer. It seems to me that if we were a good and decent society, then all the movies would be rated G. But even G-rated movies aren't so good anymore. Researchers found that 68 percent of God movies, and 82 percent of PG movies contained sexual situations. Not to mention the smut that keeps popping up on YouTube. And I'm not even going to mention what has happened to the pure and wholesome Disney movies.

The devil uses the blessing of technology to distract us from quality time with God's Word. The depressing news all around us that is updated every few minutes is robbing people of the joy of salvation. Tweets and texts and FB posts and floods of emails leave us feeling overwhelmed and constantly distracted. It can be difficult to see the Lord's blessings when we are so rushed. The devil does not need to possess people's bodies in order to ruin our lives. Sin and its effects are everywhere. We hurt. We struggle. People mistreat us. We get frustrated and lash out in anger at others. The moments of happiness we enjoy are like cotton candy in the our mouth. Sweet for a moment, but quickly gone.

That poor fellow in Luke 8 was naked and under the control of Satan, which should sound familiar. That is how each one of us came into the world – without any clothes and controlled by the devil. Sin has been passed down to each and everyone of us and it shows itself every day with our lack of patience with others, our selfish attitudes, our wasted time, and in so many good things that we fail to do. Jesus said that (Jn 8:34), **“Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”** We can not stop ourselves from sinning. The devil has ruined us all.

It's interesting to note here in Luke 8, that the demons approached Jesus because they were concerned about themselves. They did not care the poor guy whose body they were using. They were concerned about themselves. They recognized that Jesus was true God. Verse 28, **“What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me.”** (Sometimes the demon is referred to as singular – I, me. Other times it's plural – us, we. It seems that there were many demons, but they had a leader who spoke.) When Jesus asked (:30), **“What is your name?”** He replied, **“Legion.”** A legion was a company of a few thousand soldiers. There were many demons torturing this guy. Verse 31, **“They begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.”** They were terrified of going to hell which they knew would be their eternal life sentence. Verse 32, **“The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs.”** They could not do anything unless Jesus permitted them. Simply by speaking his powerful Word, Jesus controlled the demons. He did not need cloves of garlic, or a crucifix, or eye of newt, or magic potions or anything else. His Word is all powerful. Jesus permitted the demons to go into the pigs (Mark tells us that there were 2000 of them!) which promptly went mad and drowned themselves by running into the Sea of Galilee. The demons were not in any better spot. They got what they deserved for fighting against Jesus. By “demonizing” the pigs, though, Jesus showed love to that poor fellow.

He must have felt like he had been tortured in a prison and was finally released. He could calmly reflect on the horror he experienced. Someone, maybe a disciple, gave him something to wear. He was sitting down, exhausted from his ordeal. He looked up to Jesus and kept saying, "Thank you. Thank you." He also saw a crowd of people rushing toward them. They were the ones who used ropes and chains to tie him up in order to protect themselves from him. Don't you think they would have rushed to check on the man and rejoice in his sanity? Don't you think they would have bowed down in front of Jesus who could control demons with his voice? Don't you think they would have invited Jesus to dinner and tried to learn more about him? Instead, they only cared about their profit from their pigs. They lost a LOT of money when those pigs committed suicide and they did not want to lose any more money so they asked Jesus to leave.

What a tragedy! They had the Lord of life standing right in front of them and they were more concerned about their money than about the eternal destiny of their souls. Sinful human nature has not changed. As a society and as individuals, we easily get so concerned about money and our momentary happiness that Jesus gets pushed aside. Every time that we say we are too busy to read a devotion or pray, we are pushing Jesus away. As I said earlier, we are just as doomed as that demon possessed man. Just as Jesus showed love to him, he has shown love to you. He took the punishment that we deserved for our sins as he died on the cross. He crushed the devil's skull as he rose from the dead to give you victory over death and the devil. You are saved!

The powerful Word of God that Jesus used to cast the demons out of that man is the same powerful Word that God used in your baptism to cast the devil out of you. I am not exaggerating. Your baptism was an exorcism. The Apostle Paul says that we were all born spiritually dead, unbelievers (Eph 2:1). We have a baptismal font on display here so that every time you come into the Lord's house, you are reminded of your baptism. I doubt if anyone heard angels singing when you were baptized, but they were singing praises as demons hissed with anger to be cast out from another person. The Apostle Peter succinctly said (1 Pe 3:21), "**Baptism saves us.**" We were born as a child of the devil and were adopted as a child of God. The water was just simple water, but the Word of God is powerful. God promised that when his Word was connected to water, it is a baptism which drives out the devil and plants the seed of faith in a heart.

Just as that man was amazed at what Jesus had done for him, may we also keep looking to Jesus and saying, "Thank you. Thank you." We were just as doomed and helpless as this fellow, and we are just as rescued and restored as this fellow. Our hearts overflow with gratitude as we hang on to Jesus and strive to follow the 10 Commandments, showing love to God and others in whatever way we can. May we remember our baptism every day and rejoice to be called a child of God. Who cares what other people say or think about us, or how much money we have, or what's happening in our crazy world, through Jesus, you have gifts that the world's

wealthiest can not even make a down payment on. You have forgiveness for every sin. You have a piece of real estate in heaven. Who could ask for more?

Sadly, the townspeople rejected Jesus. He did not argue with them. He does not force himself on anyone. Even though they rejected Jesus, he still cared about them. Since Jesus was not going to be there, he lovingly sent a missionary to them.

to send out a missionary

Luke tells us that the man (:38), "**begged to go with Jesus.**" "Please! Please! Please!" We can understand his desire. Jesus gave him his life back. He wanted to stay with Jesus to serve him and to be safe from the demons. Instead, Jesus lovingly used his power Word to tell him (:39), "**Return home and tell how much God has done for.**" So, he did. He became a missionary to those people who rejected Jesus. It's easy to imagine him as kept telling everyone he met on the streets or in the stores what Jesus did for him. Mark's account tells us that the people (Mk 5:20), "**were amazed.**" I'd like to think that a good number of them reconsidered their opinion about Jesus.

Just as Jesus used that man to be a missionary, he uses you and me. In our first lesson this morning from Isaiah 43, twice God said, "**You are my witnesses.**" We get to tell people what Jesus has done for us, how he adopted us as his children who are destined to live with him forever in heaven. In our second lesson from 1 Timothy, we are reminded that no matter who we are and no matter what we do, we can all do something to tell people about Jesus. You are a missionary. Helping with our door hangers is an easy example. So is inviting a neighbor to church. Telling your children or grandchildren again and again that Jesus loves them is so important. Praying for our missionaries is a blessing to them even though you do not know the details of how God answers your prayers for them. Supporting this ministry and mission work is vital. Encouraging the next generation to consider being a pastor or teacher is important too. God's saving love for us is far greater than our minds can ever process. He has even placed his precious and powerful Word into our hearts and our hands so that we can share the message with others the way someone shared that message with us. Even today, Jesus lovingly uses his powerful word to cast out demons and send out missionaries. Amen.