

Pentecost 5 [Pr 7] 6/19/16
Luke 8:26-39 C

SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY,
FROM THE 8TH CHAPTER OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

These words of St. Paul remind us that our struggle in earthly life is with the very the forces of hell.

The Good News for us who walk by faith is that today's Gospel shows Jesus' power over demons. Jesus is “very God of very God,” and as God, has power over everything. In our Gospel readings these past weeks, we have heard that Jesus has power over sickness, the weather, even death. Today's account of Jesus driving out the demons teaches us that JESUS IS LORD OF ALL, AND EVEN THE DEMONS MUST OBEY HIM.

Jesus and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee into an area that was more heavily populated with Gentiles. No sooner did they set foot on the shore than a demon-possessed man challenged them. This particular demon possession was fairly spectacular. The man lived among the dead, he wore no clothes, and the locals were unable to restrain him even with chains.

Notice what Jesus did: He showed His power over the demons by making them answer His questions. They had no choice. Even their answer, “Legion,” indicates the strength of the evil forces in this man, but when the Lord commanded them to leave, they had no choice but to leave. Even when it came to where to go from the man, they needed Jesus'

permission. The demons entered the pigs and the pigs promptly stampeded into the lake and drowned.

The herdsmen had a totally predictable response to the situation. They fled into a nearby city. When the people heard the news, they went out to check out this Jesus.

What they found astonished them -- the man who was now saved was sitting at Jesus feet. This means that he was listening as Jesus taught. The round trip to the city probably took a few hours, so the man who was now free of demons had several hours of Bible class with Jesus. He could not get enough of Jesus. He even begged Jesus to go with Him when He returned across the lake.

On the other hand, the other people were terrified of Jesus and asked Him to leave. They saw Jesus as a problem ... not as a savior.

Jesus left, but He left a missionary behind. The man who was now demon free wanted to go with Jesus, "but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you'." When Jesus arrived, this man was full of demons. When Jesus left, this man was a missionary to the people on the east side of the Sea of Galilee.

Whenever the topic of demons comes up, our imaginations tend to go into overdrive. The culture we live in has come up with all kinds of speculations about demons and most of them are wrong.

The Bible teaches us that demons were once angels. God created them sometime during the six days of creation, along with all the other angels. Soon after the creation a group of angels rebelled against God. The Bible tells that God created hell specifically for these evil angels. The Bible refers to these evil angels by several names: fallen angels, unclean

spirits, evil spirits, demons, and so forth. Since demons are fallen angels, they are enemies of God.

The problem with being an enemy of God is that God is All-knowing, All-Powerful, unlimited by time and space. Even though the demons are fallen, they are still God's creatures. They cannot win against God in a direct attack. They must find some other way to express their hatred of God. The battlefield in their war against God is the human race ... us.

The demons' main weapon is the lie. Jesus warned us, "When [the devil] lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44b). We make a joke of the devil in red pajamas, horns, and a cute tail. We do that because demons present temptations in ways that make sense ... ways that seem like the right thing to do ... ways that even have a certain beauty to our fallen human reason. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14b).

In Eden, the devil used a serpent to tempt Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit. Mankind fell to that temptation. From that time on, every human being inherits a sinful nature at conception. David writes in the Psalm, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (51:5)." Likewise, Paul writes, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Ro 8:7-8).

The rite of baptism in our Lutheran Service Book says it this way, "The Word of God also teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation." We are by nature sinful and unclean. Instead of loving God with all our mind, soul, and strength, we love ourselves. Every human

being by nature is terrified of God and resists Him. Our lives apart from God show that we are, as Isaiah, says, “a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following [our] own devices” (Is 65:2). The devil’s control over us at birth may not be as spectacular as the man in today’s Gospel, but we all enter this world enemies of God and slaves to sin.

Since demons deal in deception, they adapt their lies to the culture of any given time and place. Many in our culture don’t even believe demons exist. Yet, they twist science and rationalism to draw us poor sinners away from God. Look at the lies we are daily must contend with: we evolved from monkeys; the Bible contains mistakes; you can hate your neighbor – and not even speak to them – and still be a fine, upright Christian; marriage is a curse; you can hoard more and more stuff for yourself – after all, you only go around once -- all the while ignoring your neighbor in his/her need; and I could go on and on.

Martin Luther writes to parents bringing their children to the font of baptism for the new birth of water and the Word: “Remember, therefore, that it is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from the little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy.” The devil and his demons, with all of their lies and temptations, are our mighty, life-long enemies and we are helpless against them. But, for us fights the valiant one.

Jesus is the only person who defeated the devil. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the only person who endured every temptation that the devil could throw His way and yet, never sinned. Jesus, and Jesus alone, died on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of all the world, and was raised the 3rd day for our justification. He lives to give that victory to us in the Word and the Sacraments.

Demons don't always identify themselves by driving pigs into a lake. They wear masks, masks that make them look respectable on the outside and seem very friendly. Masks of nicely dressed people, who ring your doorbell and want to give you some religious literature. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, who tempt us with all the things that please our sinful flesh. It is their goal to make us feel very comfortable in our sin and, even righteous, while traveling the path to hell.

Dear Friends in Christ, the lesson that we can take away from today's Gospel is that Jesus is the one who exposes demons and deals with them. The same Jesus Christ who demonstrated His power over demons in today's Gospel has crushed the head of the devil once and for all on the cross. His holy life, His innocent suffering and death, His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven are for you, Dear Child of God. He alone is our Fortress from the attacks of the devil. He is the only one who can give you life everlasting. He is the One, crucified, risen, and sends the Holy Spirit who works faith, so that you trust, rejoice, and find comfort in Him alone.