

19 June 2016
Pentecost 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Where Jesus Enters In, Satan Is Cast Out”
Text: Luke 8:26-39 (Galatians 3:23 - 4:7)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Just to be clear: the picture on the cover of the bulletin today was not selected for Father’s Day! Though this crazed, homeless man we heard about in the Holy Gospel today *may have been* someone’s father. And he was some father’s son. So the demon-possession that afflicted him didn’t just afflict him, but possibly many more people, including his father who lost a son, perhaps his own children who were being forced to grow up without a father, and maybe also his wife to live without her husband. Collateral damage in this spiritual war.

So the Good Shepherd acts. The satanic wolf has come and snatched one of His flock. And so He leaves the ninety-nine in Israel and goes after the one who was lost, who had been captured by satan. The people of that region had tried to bind this man and contain him for their own lives and self-preservation. Jesus had come to unbind him, to set him free, and give him his life back again. For this He goes to the country of the Gerasenes. For to the Good Shepherd, no place is too far, no place too lost, to go after one of His own.

Now, this is a story that seems pretty fantastic in our day and age in which demons and demon-possession is scoffed at and regarded as ignorant, superstitious, religious mumbo-jumbo, even by many Christians. Our western, reasonable, educated minds know better. We come up with *scientific* reasons why things happen. Demons, possession, the supernatural, is the stuff of movies and fantasy. We’ve moved past that and don’t think that way anymore.

But maybe we should. Or at least, maybe we shouldn’t write it off so quickly. In other parts of the world, the demonic is taken much more seriously and seems to be much more visible. Is that because they don’t know as much as us? Or is it because they know *more*? Is it because the demons are more active there than here? Or do the demons like the fact that we don’t think about them much here and so they have more free reign to act . . . and want to keep it that way? Satan is a pragmatist: *whatever works*.

So when it comes to demons and the demonic, there are two errors you can make: to fear them too much or to think of them too little. To fear them too much is to give them more

credit than they deserve; to think of them too little is not to give them enough. We don't want to fall into either of those ditches, but stay on the road of the truth. So this is a good story for us to consider today . . .

For if you think for one moment that what satan did to this poor man isn't what he *wants* to do to you - to possess you, to drive you, to torment you, to harm you, to destroy you - you are sorely mistaken. This is *exactly* what he wants to do to you. The reason he does not, or cannot - *the only reason* - is because God does not permit him to do so.

But that doesn't mean that satan is not active in your life. For consider for a moment: what things *are* you captive to? What sins controlling you, binding you, driving you? For some it is sexual sins whose appetites they cannot satisfy. For others anger, rage, and bitterness make them act how they do not want to act. For some despair and hopelessness is all they can see and feel. For others it is greed - the quest for riches and success at any cost that drives them. And the list is endless. Maybe we *look* more civilized and tame compared to this man, but maybe appearances are deceiving . . . maybe we are in as much danger as he . . .

So how good that the Good Shepherd has come here for you. To us who are even farther away from Israel in both time and place than the region of the Gerasenes, He doesn't come in a boat but in the waters of Holy Baptism. Here He steps into our world to deliver you from your sin and captivity. That's why when a person is baptized, it is said: *Depart unclean spirit and make way for the Holy Spirit*. And in those waters with the Word of God, God is at work. The Father adopts, the Son frees and forgives, and the Holy Spirit makes His home with you, puts you in your right mind, and clothes you with Jesus' perfect righteousness. And then just like that once-possessed man, we sit at Jesus' feet and learn from Him.

But satan doesn't then give up - he just changes tactics. He'll try to lure you away from Jesus' feet, from Jesus' teaching, Jesus' life. To forget how bad his captivity can be. To bring new false gods into your life that look and seem really good and helpful and right. To distract you, blind you, fool you, scare you - again, whatever it takes. And maybe he'll do it sooner, maybe later - makes no difference to him, as long as the end result is the same. For remember what happened to Jesus after He was baptized? He was tempted in the wilderness. And after that failed? *Satan departed from him until an opportune time* (Luke 4:13).

And while perhaps there were many such opportune times, ultimately that time came again when Jesus was hoisted up on the cross. When His disciples abandoned Him, His Father forsook Him, and the people He came to save were mocking and humiliating Him. *You gonna die, Jesus, for folks who don't even want you as their Saviour?*

Yes! Yes He is. For just as He left the ninety-nine in Israel and went to the country of the

Gerasenes to save this one man, so He left His throne in heaven to come down and save us. All of us who since the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden have been under the oppression of the evil one, captive to sin, and lost. He enters this world of sin and death and graves that we live in, to set us free and give us hope. He is the stronger man who has come to bind the strong man who has bound us (Matthew 12). And the enemy of your enemy isn't just your friend, He is your Saviour. For Jesus didn't just enter our *world* of sin and death and grave, He actually *entered* our sin and death and graves themselves, in order to destroy them and their grip on us in His resurrection. To set us free and give us life again.

And so after the freedom and life given to us in Baptism, there is also Absolution - the blessings and benefits and promises of Baptism applied again and again, to us who wander and fall and weaken and believe the lies of the devil and so need them again and again. Our Good Shepherd never tires of speaking those words of forgiveness to us - words also spoken from the cross - *Father, forgive them* (Luke 23:34). And also speaking to the evil one: *Depart from my child!*

But then after this wonderful work of Jesus, the story takes a, perhaps, unexpected turn - *the people are afraid* and *ask Jesus to leave*. Was it because of the loss of the pigs and so the loss of income? Maybe they were frightened of what happened to the man, and maybe didn't particularly like it. They were used to the way things were. What would Jesus' presence mean, then, for them? For their lives?

Those same fears are still with us today. For though Jesus' freedom and forgiveness and the life He gives is better, we don't always see it that way. We love what we love and we want what we want and we do what we do, and used to the way things are, we don't want to change. Perhaps the things that happen make it seem as if God is taking life away from us - the only life we know. But if what we don't want to change are false gods - people and things we love more than God - and the lives we're living leading us away from God, or in conflict with God and His Word, we *need* change. We need to repent. We need those pigs in our lives to run away and be drowned. But instead, some avoid church, won't talk with the pastor, hide in the graveyards of sin, deny, or even ask Jesus to leave . . . or at least leave that part of our lives alone.

And while Jesus' *does* leave in this account, He does something else very important: *He leaves the man behind*. Or maybe better to say it this way: **He stays there in the Word of this man**. That as this man stays and tells his family and friends and all of that region what God has done for him, that the Spirit work through that Word in the hearts of those who hear. To take away their fear and give them the life and faith they need. To know that Jesus hasn't come to take their life away from them, but to *give* them life. A better life, real life, eternal life.

And so today He sends pastors to preach, and He leaves you, too, in the places He has put

you, and given you folks to speak to you - to tell of all that Jesus has done for you. You might not have all the answers - I'm sure this man didn't. But this he knew: he had been possessed, and now he was free. He was frightened but now joyful. He was an outcast, but now a child of God. And that he could tell.

And so can you. To whoever God has gathered around you and whoever He has put you in the midst of. Especially when we see satan and his demons at work. When things are frightening and the world seems to be falling apart. Like when mass shootings occur and people are looking for answers. The answers aren't to be found in ourselves, or our wisdom, or how we can somehow make society better. The answer is only in the One who goes after the one. And not just the one, but each and every one. The One who gives freedom and life. The One who has come to be the light in our darkness, the hope in our despair, and our confidence in a world gone mad. He has gone to His throne in heaven, and yet is here for us in His Word and Sacraments. Still working, still giving, still saving.

And now here at His Table as both the host and the meal, to feed you. To give you what you need the most - Himself. Him and His life and forgiveness in His Body and Blood, given for you on the cross, and now given to you here. **For where Jesus enters in, satan is cast out.** So while satan is real and sin is dangerous, we have nothing to fear.

For as we heard from St. Paul earlier: *when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

That's what happened that day in the country of the Gerasenes. And that's what Jesus done **for you**. Making this a very good Father's day, indeed!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.