

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The Gospel account we heard today is not myth; it's not legend or fable; it's not a parable. St. Luke, the careful chronicler of all that Jesus "*accomplished among [them]*" during His ministry, investigated these things closely and wrote "*an orderly account*" of them (Luke 1:1-3).

To be sure, Luke records how Jesus encountered a man, demon-possessed, and such encounters are infrequent at best today. At least, I've never to my knowledge encountered anyone possessed by a demon or a legion of them. But that doesn't mean that it was some fictional account.

Nor does the fact that demon-possession is rarely seen today imply that the devil or his demon horde are of no concern for Christians today. Quite the contrary, he remains the foremost of our enemies against whom we pray morning and night: "And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil." And we don't need the Pope to change the language of these petitions to know that "God tempts no one." Rather we are praying "in this [6th] petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice." We acknowledge when we pray this petition that "we are attacked by these things" (Luther, Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, 6th Petition).

Indeed, St. Paul tells us that the devil schemes against us; that "*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. 6:11-12). And St. Peter says: "*Our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*" (1 Pet. 5:8).

The devil is our adversary, and he has a powerful army, a Legion of demons, if you will, at his side wielding wiles untold, using deceitful schemes against us, throwing flaming darts toward us. They assail our weak flesh. They use our self-indulgence, our covetousness, our bellies, our lusts to defile us, to leave us naked and as good as dead. This enemy pursues us, whether we want it to or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, and far too often we succumb to their wiles and schemes. We fall prey to their flaming darts.

In the Gospel, we hear of a man possessed by multiple demons that called themselves Legion. These unclean spirits left this man senseless, naked; they drove him to deserted places; they caused him to live among the dead in tombs and, apparently near those who raised pigs. All of this made him unclean.

We feel sorry for this man's tribulations, but friends, remember your own unclean beginnings, for you began your lives in the same way: "*Naked [you] came from [your] mother's womb*" (Job 1:21), dead in your sins and trespasses (Eph. 2:1), living your lives metaphorically among the tombs, living in deserted places, separated from God by your sin. You rightly confess that by your sin you offend God and justly deserve to be cast into the eternal punishment of the abyss.

But God has intervened. God sent forth the offspring of Jacob and Judah to spread out His hands for a rebellious people like us (Isa. 65:2, 9). God sent forth His Son, the offspring of woman, the seed promised in the garden, to intervene, that through Jesus Christ, the "*Son of the Most High God,*" nothing might be able to separate us from God. So, in this case, God intervened in the person of Jesus who cast out the demons—and not just one, but a legion of them.

But more than that, Jesus came to intervene for us, for what Jesus did in our text was just a precursor to the greater defeat that He would deliver to the devil and his minions. Luther penned it; we sing it: "The old evil foe" has been "judged; the deed is done" (LSB656 "A Mighty Fortress). Done in the fullness of God's time; done by God's Son, born of woman—incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; done by the Son spreading His hands out on the tree of the cross; done by the bruising of His heel; done by the crushing of the ancient serpent's head; done by redeeming us by His blood from the law.

Who is He who has clothed you in your nakedness as He did your parents in the Garden? Who is He who has made you alive who are dead in your sins? Who is He who has spanned the gulf between heaven and earth, who has undone the separation Adam's sin caused, who has united you unto Himself, into His own body? It is He "*who died—more than that, who was raised—who is [now seated] at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for [you].*" It is He who made you "*more than conquerors*" (Rom. 8:34-39). It is He who clothed you with His righteousness in Holy Baptism—you "*have put on Christ.*" It is He who calls you "*sons of God, through faith.*" It is He who fights for us, the Valiant One. "Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, Of Sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God; He holds the field forever" (LSB656).

But think not that this good news means that the devil is no longer your troubler. He is. He's still powerful, and he still has a demon legion ready to do his bidding. He's still dangerous, even though Christ has defeated him and has set you free from the guilt and condemnation of your sins. So stay alert, St. Paul says. Stay armed with the whole armor of God. Keep God's word handy. Pray for yourselves and one another (Eph. 6:11-18). "*Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith*" (1 Tim. 6:11-12). "*Do*

good, ... be rich in good works, ... be generous and ready to share” (1 Tim. 6:18), for this is the way for those who follow Christ.

And more. After Jesus cast out the demons from the man, he was in his right mind again, clothed, and sitting at Jesus’ feet. And later, he proclaimed throughout the city what God the Son, Jesus, had done.

Similarly in your baptism, the unclean spirits have departed from you and made way for the Holy Spirit. Clothed with Christ, you now are privileged to sit at Jesus’ feet, and learn from Him, and from there to go out and *“declare how much God has done for you,”* that is, *“how much Jesus has done for you.”*

And “they” will listen to you for the same reason they listened to the man in our text. He had been changed. Being a Christian implies a change in you, a *“newness of life”* (Rom. 6:4). St. Paul says, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind”* (Rom. 12:2). Again, St. Paul says, *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come”* (2 Cor. 5:17). Therefore, St. Paul says, *“we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us”* (2 Cor. 5:20). That is, *“go and declare how much God has done for you.”*

Again, that means, proclaim what *“Jesus has done for you.”* Tell of Jesus, born of woman, our redeemer; tell of cross and resurrection; tell of the defeat of sin, death, and the power of the devil; tell of grace and forgiveness, reconciliation and hope; tell of the new life in holy baptism and eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus. Not myth or legend, not fable or parable. It’s His-story, but it has become our story.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.