

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Many today discount the devil's influence, but they do so at their peril. He is the archenemy of mankind; he is the deceiver in the garden (Gen. 3), a slanderer, "*a liar and the father of lies*" (John 8:44); he is a murderer, who by his temptation brought sin and death into the world, not just to Adam and Eve, but to all mankind (Rom. 5:12). With good reason does Scripture warn us to "*be sober-minded*" and "*watchful*" when it comes to this enemy, as we "*resist him*" (1 Pet. 5:8).

The devil is our adversary, and he has a powerful army arrayed against us, "*spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places,*" demons using deceitful schemes against us, throwing flaming darts toward us (Eph. 6:10-18). They assail our weak flesh. They use our self-indulgences, our covetousness, our bellies, our lusts to tempt us. This enemy pursues us, though perhaps not so openly as in our Gospel lesson, with its demon-possession. But he still pursues us, and far too often we are pierced by those darts and succumb to their wiles.

In our text, we hear how Jesus encountered a man who had demons, many demons. "*Legion,*" the man said was their name. (A Roman legion had 3,000 to 6,000 soldiers.) The man exhibited behavior often associated with demon-possession: Luke says he had extraordinary strength and could break the chains put on him; Matthew tells us that he would attack people who passed by; Mark tells us he cut himself with stones; and they all report that he knew things that he should not know. Luke with Mark reports that he knew who Jesus was and called Him by name, and he called Him the "*Son of the Most High God*" — and this demoniac was a Gentile.

This was truly a dangerous man, and yet Jesus showed no fear. The man came out to Jesus as He got off the boat, perhaps at first to do to Jesus what he had done to many passersby. But he didn't attack Jesus. Rather he fell down before Him in perhaps a foreshadowing of St. Paul's saying: that "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*" (Phil. 2:10-11). So it will be for many today who under Satan's influence reject Jesus' lordship. They will still one day bend the knee before Jesus and acknowledge that He is Lord, the Son of the most High God. And it will be done to the glory of God the Father, but because of their rejection, it will not be for their salvation.

Jesus did not fear this man or the demons that inhabited his body, for Jesus was God's intervention in a world ruled by this world's prince. That brood of the ancient serpent that inhabited this man had it exactly wrong. They wanted Jesus to stop meddling in their business with this man, but meddling with their business

was exactly why Jesus came as the offspring of woman. Jesus was born of woman to redeem this man and the rest of mankind burdened by sin, death, and Satan.

God had promised it long ago. *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring”* (Gen. 3:15). Jesus was that offspring, who from the flesh of His mother Mary partook of our *“flesh and blood”* so that He might also take on the curse of being under the law —sin and death. Jesus was cursed further by being hanged from the tree of the cross unto death (Gal. 3:10, 13), but this so that by dying *“he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”* By this death, would the serpent's head be crushed (Gen. 3:16); by this death and subsequent resurrection would we be delivered from the fear of death that enslaves us (Heb. 2:14-15).

What Jesus therefore did for this man, intervening in his life by sending the demons off into a herd of pigs that rushed down the steep bank into the lake and perished, was but a foretaste of His intervention as the atoning sacrifice of the sins of the world. This defeat of Satan's minions was but a foretaste of the Stronger man's binding of the strong man, that He might plunder his house. *“He's judged; the deed is done”* (LSB656:3).

It is done, *“finished,”* accomplished (John 19:30), but that doesn't mean that the devil is not still a strong enemy. He is still. Luther called him *“the old evil foe,”* and reminds us that with *“Deep guile and great might”* he fights against us. *“On earth is not his equal”* (LSB656:1). Thus, we prayed as we sang last Sunday: *“Keep us from the evil one; Uphold our faith most holy. And let us trust Thee solely With humble hearts and lowly. Let us put God's armor on, With all true Christians running Our heav'nly race and shunning The devil's wiles and cunning”* (LSB505:1).

Let us consider what Jesus has done for us. Certainly He has defeated our enemies by His cross and resurrection, but He has united us in His victory by our baptism. The unclean spirit in us was cast out, and it was drowned in the baptismal waters along with our sins. The way was prepared for the Holy Spirit to come and make His home in us that we might walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit, that we might live not as those enslaved to sin, but as sons in the freedom of the Gospel.

More than that, we are privileged now to sit at Jesus' feet, and learn from Him. And from there to go out and *“declare how much God has done for you,”* which by the cleansed man's example means to proclaim *“how much Jesus has done for you.”* It begins in the home, as Jesus instructed the man. On this Father's Day, may we men especially take to heart our duty to lead our families well and to *“bring [our children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”* (Eph. 6:4).

And from the family — which is truly the foundation of a strong society — this message will spread rather naturally into the city as we live as Christian men and women, distinguishing ourselves as Christians, letting our *“light shine before others, so that they may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven”* (Matt. 5:16).

And this is why people will listen to you, as surely as the people in the man's city did . . . because he had changed. So have you. Baptized into Christ, you have been changed. You have died to sin, and been raised to walk in newness of life. St. Paul says you have had your mind renewed — let that transform you (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).

And then St. Paul says, *“we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us”* (2 Cor. 2:20), which is just another way of saying to us, “go and declare how much God, how much Jesus, has done for you.”

What do you say? Actually, there's a lot to say. Start with the creed, telling especially of Jesus, of cross and resurrection. Tell of sin, but especially of forgiveness. Tell of the devil and his defeat. Tell of God's love, of redemption, of sonship, of freedom in Christ, of new life, of baptism, of reconciliation, of regeneration, of faith, of hope, of everlasting life.

Do not underestimate the devil. He remains a fearsome enemy, but do not fear. Rather be confident: Christ has defeated the devil and given you His victory. Rejoice! You know the love of God in Christ Jesus, a perfect love, which casts out fear (1 John 4:18). *“[B]e strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”* (Eph. 6:10), eating Christ's supper, hearing His word, girding yourselves for your lives of letting Christ's light shine before others that God may be glorified.

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