

June 22, 2025
Second Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 8:26–39

I.N.I.

Sermon preached by the Rev. Richard A. Lammert at Zion Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, IN

Theme: “Jesus Has Power over Demons and Satan”

In the name of ✠ Jesus. **Amen.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Today we begin that long line of Sundays that are simply numbered “after Pentecost”: the Second Sunday after Pentecost, the Third Sunday after Pentecost, the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, and so on, until we arrive at the Last Sunday after Pentecost, the last Sunday of the church year, in late November. With the exception of a few festivals, such as Reformation, we will simply be counting the Sundays from now until the end of the church year.

After the portion of the church year with all the festivals—Christmas, the Transfiguration, Lent, Easter, and others—all those rather exciting times celebrating the events in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ—we enter the season where we simply number the Sundays after Pentecost. After all those festivals, our Sundays can seem now rather mundane.

But *mundane* means not only “uninteresting” but also “having to do with this world.” During this time we get to focus particularly on the Christian life in this world. After spending time reviewing the life of Christ and seeing how His life affects our life, we turn once again to the words and teachings of our Lord on how we as Christians show forth our faith in this world—what that faith is and what it means for us. Thus, we also call this portion of the church year the “Time of the Church,” the time to look at the church—the people of God, we Christians—in the world.

The liturgical color has turned to green. The season after Pentecost is a time when we grow and mature in our Christian faith. We listen to the words of Jesus and apply them, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to our own lives. During the current church year, our Gospel readings are taken from the Gospel according to Saint Luke. Today, we will consider the words of our Lord with the theme, “Jesus Has Power over Demons and Satan.”

Just before our text today, St. Luke tells us that Jesus had suggested to the disciples that they set out to cross the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore. They had encountered a storm on the lake, and Jesus had calmed the storm, so that the disciples would not drown. We pick up the story with the boat continuing its short journey to the eastern shore of the lake, “to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee” (Luke 8:26).

Although still on the Sea of Galilee, this country was no longer the Jewish territory of Galilee, but was part of the Hellenistic territory of the “ten cities,” that

is, “the Decapolis.” The people of the area would be predominately non-Jewish, either Romans or citizens of the Roman empire.

When Jesus had stepped out of the boat onto the land, He was met by a man from the area who had demons. “For a long time this man had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs” (Luke 8:27) St. Luke tells us. A few verses later, St. Luke uses the term “unclean spirit” to refer to the demons. Since I will use the word *unclean* repeatedly here, I need to talk about its meaning.

We hear lepers crying out “unclean” in the Bible; we hear about unclean animals, like pigs or carrion eaters; we hear about a person becoming unclean by touching a corpse. We might think that the word has to do with cleanliness or health. But that is not the case. *Unclean* means ritually impure, something not tolerated in the worship of the true God. Something unclean could not be used in worship. An unclean person needed to be purified before approaching God in worship. Such a person was segregated from the community of God’s people as long as he remained unclean.

The man who met Jesus was unclean. He had demons, specifically called an “unclean spirit” a few verses later. He wore no clothes, segregating himself from human community. He lived among the tombs, where dead people were buried and could be buried. Such a place was off limits to Jews who did not want to become unclean. St. Luke also tells us that the evil spirit in him would drive him out into the desert (Luke 8:29)—considered a place of evil spirits.

And the man was a pagan, a non-Jew. Admittedly, St. Luke does not tell us this explicitly, but he has made a point of indicating that Jesus was now “opposite Galilee,” in pagan territory. This man was the epitome of “unclean.”

There is one more indication of the depth of his uncleanness, his distance from God’s kingdom. When Jesus asks the man, “What is your name?” he responds by saying “Legion.” St. Luke explains this name by noting that “many demons had entered him” (Luke 8:31). We already knew that the man had demons—St. Luke introduces him that way. Here we find out the sheer number of them. The name is a reference to the number of soldiers in a Roman legion, at the time of Jesus 5,200 men. Thus, the man had not merely “many demons,” but “*very* many demons.

I think there is one more indication in this name of how far from the kingdom of God this man was. I have no way of proving my idea, and you certainly don’t have to accept it to appreciate the situation of this man. Why did the demons choose a Latin word to describe their number? I don’t think they meant that there were exactly 5,200 of them in the demon-possessed man. Since exactness was not needed, the demons could have used a Hebrew word to express the same idea of “a large number.”

Yet the demons chose a Latin word. I think that was the final “poke in the eye,” as it were, to Jesus and to God. At the time of the incident itself, the Roman legion was not in high favor, as the military force of what the Jews considered an occupying power. At the time the Gospels had been written, the Roman force was even more of a power against the Christian church. I see this as a taunt to Jesus, showing Him how irredeemable this man was, and then seeing how Jesus would react.

However, whether or not you accept this idea, the degradation of this man is already eminently clear. The question that any Jewish hearer or reader of this story—as well as our own question—is “Would Jesus have anything to do with this man?” Yes, Jesus deals mercifully with the man. Jumping back to the initial encounter with the man. Jesus doesn’t even stop to ask the man whether he desires to be healed. He began to command the unclean spirit to come out of the man (Luke 8:29). But the man responded abruptly to Jesus: “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me” (Luke 8:28). A few verses later we read that the demons begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss (Luke 8:31).

The demons possessing the man speak out, addressing Jesus. They know exactly who Jesus is: the Son of the Most High. The “Most High” is the same term that Zechariah used to refer to God when he prophesied that his son John would be called “the prophet of the Most High” (Luke 1:76). But, at least as importantly, the demons knew what Jesus could do. They did not want Jesus to torment them, that is, drive them into the abyss.

The abyss is the ultimate destination of Satan and his demons. The abyss appears in the book of Revelation as the bottomless pit, in which Satan and his demons will be kept for all eternity. The abyss—and bottomless pit—is a place of torment and despair, exactly as described by the demons in our story.

Note that I said that the abyss is the *ultimate* destination of these demons. Yet the demons were concerned that their ultimate end was about to come upon them *now*. They knew not only that Jesus was the Son of the Most High, the Son of God, but that He also brought with Him the end of the ages.

Those of you who attend Dr. Voelz’s Bible class will anticipate what I am going to say. We have here a case of proleptic eschatology. The end of the ages is present in the person of Jesus Christ, ahead of time. Jesus brings the end of the ages into history *now*. He was capable of sending all of these demons into the bottomless pit at that proleptic moment, with the end of the ages descending on the demons at that very moment.

Nevertheless, Jesus listened to the demons. There was a herd of pigs on the hillside, and the demons begged Jesus to send them into the pigs. St. Luke remarks simply, “So he gave them permission” (Luke 8:32). The demons were *never* in control of the situation, although they gave every indication of being the dominant party. The demons were not able to move into a herd of pigs without Jesus’ permission.

The pigs then took on the agitated state that the demoniac formerly displayed, rushed over the hillside and were drowned. It is quite appropriate—and almost an object lesson—that the unclean spirits took over the unclean pigs, leaving the man whom they had formerly inhabited. God does not will that any of his created human beings have unclean spirits dwelling in them.

The herdsmen of the pigs were quick to call the townspeople to witness what had happened. The townspeople probably were quite concerned about the drowned pigs, but St. Luke notes only their attention to the former demoniac: “Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man

from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind” (Luke 8:35).

What they find is a complete contrast to their former experience with the man. He is now clothed—no longer naked—and sitting at the feet of Jesus. This is the posture of a disciple, a student, listening to a teacher. He is also “in his right mind.” The verb translated here means “to be able to think in a sound or sane manner, *be of sound mind*” (BDAG). To be in the kingdom of God is to be of sound mind, be in one’s right mind. This is in stark contrast to the kingdom of Satan, where the man was *not* of a sound, sober mind when he was demon-possessed.

Besides the man’s sitting at the feet of Jesus, there is another indication that he who was so abysmally far from the kingdom of God was now under the reign and rule of God. Luke states, “those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed” (Luke 8:36). The verb translated “healed” here can also mean “saved.” The man was not only physically healed, but also spiritually saved. All of the work of the demons had been undone by Jesus.

The man who had been healed certainly had no difficulty in being in the presence of Jesus. Not so everyone else in the community. They all feared Jesus, and asked Him to leave, which He did. This is the final irony in the story. The one who was furthest from the kingdom of God, with everything in his life that divided him from God, was now in the kingdom of God, while the people of the area, who were probably by and large pretty decent people, were as far away as ever, or perhaps even more so, since they asked Jesus to leave them.

I stated in my introduction to the sermon that during the Time of the Church in the church year, we focus on our lives as Christian. I will point out two focuses in our text for our Christian lives. The first focus is my theme, “Jesus Has Power over Demons and Satan.” After the story in our reading from Luke, I will expand that to “Jesus Has *Absolute* Power over Demons and Satan.” No one is outside of the grasp of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It is still true, as Paul wrote to Timothy, that “God our Savior . . . desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:3–4).

For the second focus, I need to finish our Gospel story. As Jesus left the area, the man healed from demon-possession wanted to come with Him. Jesus told Him, “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you” (Luke 8:39). If you want to see what that means for you, just look back at the Hymn of the Day (LSB 825).

There is one final Gospel nugget in our Gospel reading. It concludes, “And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him” (Luke 8:39). But, wait a minute. Jesus had told him to declare “how much *God* has done for you.” What does he declare? “How much *Jesus* had done for him.” He now not only understood, as the demons did, that Jesus was God, but he believed it and lived it.

May God work also in *your* Christian lives to declare how much Jesus has done for you.

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**