

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

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

The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I mentioned last week that we now enter the half of the church year that (we might say) focuses on the life of the Christian instead of the earthly life of Christ. But, to begin this half of the church year, let's be careful to interpret that statement correctly. To be sure, the Gospel is *always* about Christ, for He is the Gospel. But, during much of this half of the year, the Readings tend to spend a lot of time focusing on his teaching, teaching which *does* specifically relate to us – is meant for us – and for our daily lives as his disciples, his followers.

So what do we do with a text like this morning's, in which the focus is on Jesus' authority over the demons? We have a few options:

1. We could ask Jesus to do a miracle for us, too, and free us from our life's "demons" (and define "demons" as any nagging life-problem we see ourselves having). But that interpretation

is not only Scripturally inaccurate, but will also leave us in despair if and when that daily-life problem remains.

2. We could spiritualize the text and say that this is a “picture” / metaphor of Jesus saving the sinner. But that undercuts the historicity of our Lord’s mission and its written record and of this event.
3. Or, we could acknowledge that He who was powerful over the demons continues to be powerful over Satan, sin, and Old Adam... but in ways the world today rejects and fears and mocks just as much as it did when the townspeople asked Jesus to leave the region. (Imagine that! – Jesus comes and shows his authority over the demons... frees not only the man, but by extension also those who had to deal with that demon-possessed man in daily life... frees them all from the demonic dangers – and they fear *Jesus*, and want him to depart.

Here is where we start to see the text rightly. Jesus once in history proved himself the Messiah through his signs and miracles. Some of the most potent of those miracles were his signs of authority over the demons – certainly, the people would recognize this as a sure sign that He was the Messiah, God in the flesh! Certainly, the man recognized it! When Jesus said, “Go, tell everyone what God has done for you,” the man went and spoke of all that *Jesus* had

done for him. Yes, surely, everyone else would recognize that Jesus is God in the flesh and, thus, would fall at his feet and cherish him. Instead, they fear him! Having *normalized life with the demonic*, they find Jesus to be more off-putting, and they desire to be rid of him.

In a world in which we still wrestle not against flesh-and-blood, but against the powers and principalities of darkness, the ascended Jesus' work is still the same, and it's still met largely the same way, with people normalizing the demonic and wanting to send Jesus away:

First, consider that it is comparably similar work – but, greater work! What Jesus once did for the *moment* to show He was the Messiah, He now does for lifetimes, freeing sinners from the demonic, that they may live as people of God: “once you were people of the dark, now you are people of the light *because you belong to the Lord.*” That’s Paul’s joyful explanation to the Ephesians, and it all hinges on what? – on baptism into Christ’s saving death: “Depart you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit.” That’s the mini-exorcism in the Baptismal Rite, isn’t it? ...Is that merely ‘symbolic’? No, the child was a child of darkness! You, before your baptism, were “children of darkness”! And, that baptism is the powerful working of God... which most people trivialize as human work, human customs symbolizing

religious faithfulness supposedly already present . Having *normalized the life of darkness*, having rationalized away original sin as simply a need for philosophical enlightenment rather than the need to be rescued from sin, death, and the power of the devil, so many are not only dismissive of the divine work of Baptism, but see it as their completed devotional custom to God and, thus, reason to now dismiss and walk away from the truth of Christ's salvation... They already jumped through that hoop, they think! They would rather be rid of Him and His promises than admit the reality of such spiritual darkness being overcome, not by man's reasoning and explanations, but being overcome in realtime before our very eyes by *God* at work.

But the man in our text knew the truth. He had been freed from demons. You know the truth. You have been freed from demons! Freed in your baptism to be people of God!

And Jesus sends the man to *tell everyone* what has been done for him. Let that sink in! Isn't that amazing? Go speak to everyone who just saw the result – the herdsmen, the townspeople! Go explain to them that what they saw with their own eyes is, indeed, the truth.

Isn't that similar to the Christian life? – our family, friends, and neighbors all probably know what baptism looks like. They've probably all seen it before... maybe even came and watched yours

or your loved ones. But Jesus says, they need to be told. They don't believe their eyes, for the truth of the work is too divinely impressive to believe it can be done so simply. Those same family, friends, and neighbors all also probably know what the Lord's Supper looks like. They've probably seen it before. But they need to be told it again, have it explained again. For how can such eating and drinking do such great things? So, lovingly, patiently, we encourage them, "Let's talk about this! Be taught *first*; eat with us second."

And, most fundamentally, our families, friends, and neighbors... they all have 'seen in their mind's eye' the news of the crucifixion of Christ. But they need to have it explained to them, for they are more comfortable in the darkness of sin... to the point they don't even believe they're *in* the darkness of sin and need to be *freed* from the darkness of sin... and so, they need it told to them again and again that the Messiah – God in the flesh – has done his great and foundational work: He has laid down His life upon the cross for them, precisely because they *needed* him to, and taken it up again, that He may pour forth divine benefits through His ongoing divine and sacramental work, that all may be rescued from spiritual darkness and live in the light of the Gospel.

But, where *they* need to hear the truth again and again, so do *we*. For we often grow numb to the Scriptures as a true

historical record of Jesus, God Himself, at work. Think of the fact that the Israelites, some 45 days after the Exodus, after the great Ten Plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea – 45 days later were grumbling against God and wanted to go back to Egypt. They had grow numb to his great work; and so do we... and so we misinterpret and misapply texts like these, in this way: we say, “Look, the man was freed from the demonic and lived happily ever after. I have been freed from spiritual darkness and I should be able to live happily ever after.” Our desire to apply a fairy-tale end to the story does not actually fictionalize the truth of Christ’s work among us. But it *does* lead us to misinterpret not only His work, but the truth of *our life in* this work, our *baptismal* life in his work. And, with such Cinderella-spectacles on, we become despondent when life isn’t just “happily ever after;” and then we begin to rationalize what “must have failed in Jesus’ work,” and then we normalize the spiritual darkness that still attacks us, but to which we are blind because of our Cinderella-spectacles.

You see, demon-*possession* is much different than demon-*oppression*. In Holy Baptism, the unclean spirits were cast out of you and the Holy Spirit took residence and made your body his temple. We’ve heard much about this truth in recent weeks (not only our epistle reading this morning – “whoever has been baptized into Christ has put on Christ”)... also in recent weeks,

with the focus on Acts 2 and the day of Pentecost: “Repent and be baptized, and you will receive the gift of: the Holy Spirit.” We also hear it in Paul’s words to Timothy, “God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

However, where we often misinterpret and misapply this when we think the casting out of Satan is the same as an immediate *perfection* of the Christian. But the one who needs to be saved by Christ is not an ‘otherwise perfect person’ captive to the power of the devil, so that – once freed from the devil – I am ready to live in perfection! Nor is the one who needs to be saved the one who – once freed from the devil – just needs self-improvement.

No, the Scriptures say the Old Adam is the true problem. The sinful self is the idol within that is worshiped and adored, so that – normalizing our sin – we would rather be rid of Christ. And, where the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the heart of the baptized, he gives birth to a New Adam to wrestle against that Old Adam. But where the New Adam is strengthened and sustained by Word and Sacrament (the mighty works of God’s light in deceptively simple ways), the Old Adam is strengthened by the

works of darkness, and the devil and his minions love to feed Old Adam whenever and wherever possible.

New Adam recognizes this... and recognizes that the normal daily life of temptation (your daily life!) can also include demonic *oppression* (pressure, force upon us)... especially in a society which has normalized, and now some even worship, satanic darkness... And in a society which gives such welcome to the powers and principalities of darkness, (a darkness that need not attack those who already eagerly belong to it), in such a society, should not Christians anticipate and recognize the regularity with which Satan will tempt and the demons will oppress the New Adam, in a myriad of seemingly normal ways, ways that Old Adam normalizes as part of daily life: Sexual deviancy *abounds* in our society; and you are tempted by it. The love of and championing of God's designs for marriage and children is cratering in our society; and you are tempted to go along with it. Material wealth and monetary or reputational success is idolized by our society; and you are tempted to measure your life by it. Hateful *thoughts* of neighbor are justified, and the eagerness to turn those thoughts into action boil under the surface, and you know that, too! And all the while a myriad of false religions abound as ideas of how to supposedly "help," while

enticing New Adam to send away the Christ in his midst; and you are tempted to *compare* those religions.

But, as children of Baptism, consider how much God has done for us. (Notice how Jesus even says that to the man: “Consider *how much* – not just that God has done ‘something,’ but *how much* God has done for us? And, as the man confesses the God who has done much for us is Jesus himself. So, let us not only confess Christ before men, but let us also pray that Christ remain close to us, indeed that He continually keep His promise to strengthen and sustain us... that His Holy Spirit continually use the preaching of the Word to prick the very hearts where He resides, and to call to repentance all the effort of Old Adam to dissuade and discourage and disrupt and dethrone New Adam... let us pray that New Adam may daily rise and despair of Old Adam, repent of such sin, rejoice in Christ’s forgiveness, be fed Christ himself as the food of strength and sustenance to continue the spiritual warfare while we sojourn in the wilderness toward the promised land... and finally and forever drown Old Adam and be forever free of Satan’s enticing.

In our text, the man wanted to remain with Jesus. Not too long after, the disciples in the Upper Room desired the same. “Where I am going, you cannot now come.” But he bids us go be in the world, but not of the world. Not *of* the world, not belonging

to the world, not enticed by the world... but *in* the world... that we may go and tell everyone not just “*of* Jesus” ... that’s not what Christ says. That’s a given. *Everything* is about Jesus. No, that’s not all Christ says. Rather, he says, go and tell everyone “how *much* God has done for you.”

First, recognize that for yourselves: He has taken his creature – you, which your own sin broke and made worthless, fit to discard and throw away – and he took that creature and **redeemed** you, atoned for your sins and died for you, that you may be his own and live under him in his kingdom – and He even now sacramentally comes to you and sustains you against spiritual darkness (Old Adam, the world, and all the power of the devil)... that you may one day go with him and be where he is in the resurrection and the new creation.

First, recognize that for yourselves, and do not explain away the simplicity of the divine majesty of His work. Be sustained and strengthened anew each week in that marvelous truth by Jesus’ marvelous Word and Sacrament, no matter how simple they may seem. And then, be not ashamed before men... but confess boldly and tell how much God has done for you.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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