

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT (OCULI)

March 4 2018

Old Test: Exodus 8:16-24

Epistle: Ephesians 5:1-9

Gospel: Luke 11:14-28

Standing...

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

In our gospel lesson, Jesus tells the religious leaders that the Kingdom of God has indeed come upon them, proving it by casting out a demon. Yet they refuse to believe.

Might that never be said of any of us.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

I've told you before

that when Jesus is said to be in league with the Devil—

that's when He starts speaking in parables.

Speaking in parables marks a drastic change in His ministry.

Let me tell you something else—which may seem unrelated, but it's not.

Sampson—you remember Sampson? He was not this strapping,

Herculean kind of guy. I know...he's always depicted that way.

There's even a movie out about him right now,

where you guessed it,

Sampson is this knuckle-dragging Neanderthal of a man.

He's huge. However, when you think Sampson,

think...Barney Fife...with long hair—think, less than

average—someone who would never be in a body building competition—ever.

This is why everyone was so puzzled at the source of Sampson's strength.

Because **who** the people saw on one hand, and what he was able to do on the other—it was hard to explain.

Hold that thought...

In our gospel lesson,

a demon has taken up residence within a man,

making him both unable to speak, and, according to Matthew, blind.

And yes, demons are real.

This demon holds this man prisoner in darkness and silence.

With no one to free him from this dreadful condition—

but Jesus can.
 No demon can stand up to Jesus.
 The bodily possession ends as soon as Jesus says so.

Again, **Who** the people saw do this on one hand,
 and what He was able to do on the other—it was hard to explain.
 Jesus is more powerful than demons!
 Casting them out with a word.
 “This can’t be the Son of David, can it?”
 “This can’t be the promised Messiah...”

Absolutely not—
 The Pharisees say, “We know His trick!”
 “He does all this by the power of Beelzebul!”
 which means, “Lord of the flies”—a mocking title for Satan.

The Pharisees were saying,
 You people are impressed by what Jesus does because you’re untrained.
 You’re nothing but gullible crowds.
 Go back home folks—nothing more to see here.
 Jesus takes orders from Satan—that explains it.

But Jesus knows who He is, Who sent Him, and for Whom He speaks.
 He was not in collusion with the Devil—
 and He goes on to explain that their argument is illogical and inconsistent.
 He continues by telling them who they’re dealing with...He says,
*But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons,
 then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

Finger of God...

You’ll recall that as a reference to when God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt.
 Remember when Moses threw down his staff and it became a snake?
 Pharaoh’s magicians did the same, by means of their dark arts.
 Their staffs turned into snakes but were gobbled up by Moses’.
 Nevertheless, they were able to change them. Pharaoh wasn’t impressed.
 Then came the first two plagues—
 of water turning to blood and,
 of calling up frogs to infest the land,
 Pharaoh’s magicians again were able to replicate these
 because demonic forces were at work...
 But when that third plague struck...
 the one with the gnats,
 even though the magicians tried,
 they could not replicate that.
 The demons couldn’t help anymore.
 Pharaoh’s magicians knew,

Moses is being helped by One stronger
 than demons, telling Pharaoh,
 “This is the finger of God.”
 So, the logic goes, if pagan,
 Egyptian magicians could
 recognize the finger of God,
 Jesus is asking, then why can’t
 you do the same?

The crowds are right.

Jesus is none other than the Son of David.
 The Spirit-anointed Messiah ushering in the kingdom of God.
 And to prove it, He’s laying His finger on demoniacs so as to deliver people.
 Again, this is not collusion with the Devil—this is an invasion!

And speaking of invasion...

Jesus points out the proper scenario between Himself and the Devil.
 Hear it again. Jesus says,
When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe;

That is Jesus describing the Devil and the way he haughtily rules the world.

And what are the strong man’s goods? The souls of mankind, specifically,
 the man whom Jesus just delivered that everybody saw
 and were amazed by.

And like Sampson of old, Jesus is stronger than the strongman—

He doesn’t look it, but He is,
 nor is He afraid—not in the least bit.
 He enters the strong man’s palace,
 binds him and then rescues the possessed man—
 doing so right under the strong man’s nose.

Then Jesus adds,

Whoever is not with me is against me—
 those against Him were the ones saying that He was in league with the Devil.
 And again, *Whoever does not gather with me scatters.*

It’s the dividing line between Satan and salvation.

There are two parties, either of light or darkness, either of God or of Satan.
 And this “either/or” runs throughout Scripture.
 There is no third possibility, no middle ground, no neutrality.

Jesus then issues a warning,

describing what we cannot see—but He can.
 And because we can’t see it, we take it by faith.

What does a demon do when it's been cast out? Jesus explains,

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first."

How scary is that?

The expelled demon wanders around.

Finding no place to dwell, it returns to its former abode.

If he finds it swept and put in order,

but vacant—that's what Jesus is warning against,

the demon then moves back in—this time with more demons.

Jesus is saying, there must be a different kind of Spirit indwelling the person, to make sure the demon never comes back. And gratefully, Jesus expels the powers of darkness by means of Holy Baptism—

where He applies the salvation won on the cross to you.

Baptism is the finger of God at work,

causing unholy spirits and their threats to be cast out—

so as to make room for the Holy Spirit.

Sure, to the unbelieving eye,

baptism looks like nothing more than some ancient, churchly ritual.

Yet, with the eyes of faith,

it's Jesus binding the strong man,

ransacking his palace and

bringing you, you and you (and even little Jase Pierce) into

the safety of His Church, where Jesus says, "This one

belongs to Me!" St. Paul says it like this,

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and

transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom

we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians

1:13-14).

Or as we learn in the Small Catechism,

"He...purchased and won me from all sins, from death

and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver,

but with His holy, precious blood and with His

innocent suffering and death that I may be His own

and live under Him in His kingdom..." as opposed to

living under the tyranny of the Devil.

Jesus is stronger than the strong man. Jesus delivers you.

But those demons...they don't give up that easily, do they?

This is why the Devil must not only be driven out, but he must be kept out.

And this is done by hearing the Word of God and guarding it,
by being where God delivers His gifts to you.

By being where the Word of God is proclaimed,
where faith is bestowed,
where the forgiveness of sins is received
and by feeding on Him in His Holy House.

At this point, a woman calls out praising Jesus' Mother,

“Blessed is the womb that bore you and breasts at which you nursed.”

Blessed are the organs that gave you life Jesus.

Yet Jesus responds with a blessing of different organs, namely one's
ears—

“Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.”

Those who hear the word of God and guard it.

Beloved, that's what you do by coming to where your Lord Jesus meets you to fill you
with His Word and His very Body and Blood in the Holy Supper.

You guard, you protect, you embrace the Word of God by living lives of daily repentance
and faith, returning to the House of the Lord to confess your sins and receive the
absolution you so desperately need.

Jesus is indeed stronger than the strong man.

And you are His treasured possession.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and
minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sitting...