

Luke 11.14-28  
*Oculi* (Lent 3)  
24 March 2019  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

Beloved in the Lord: Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Gospel for today both gives a wonderful promise and comes with a terrible warning.

Jesus is right in the middle of casting a demon out of a man—a demon that has made the man deaf and mute. Matthew adds that this man was blind, as well. This is someone whose particular demon possessed not only his soul, but even his members. And just as Jesus had done with all the rest—all the other demons who must flee at His name and in His presence—, He exorcised this one, too. And the proof of it was in the pudding. No guessing this time whether it had happened or not: for the deaf mute began to speak.

What a beautiful picture of the Gospel: God in Christ does what the man could not do for himself. There were no exercises. There was no trying harder. For the man was caught and locked up in his own physical disability. And what possessed him—the demon—he had no power over. Quite the contrary. The demon held the man in utter subjection and subjugation. There was no *Hudini* move to be made.

That's lesson #1. Jesus does for the man what the man could not do for himself. And in this, Jesus draws and paints a beautiful picture of the Gospel.

Because this is just how it went for you, too. You, too, were entirely helpless. Completely and fully kept under lock and key by the prince of this world. You had received the contagion of sin from your own parents. And it had spread through you entirely, like metastasized cancer. There was no escaping it, as David says, "I was born with iniquity, and with sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51)

And you know what that contagion is like. The good you would do—that do you not; and the evil you would not do—that's exactly what you do do. And that's as a baptized believer in Christ!

Imagine your helplessness apart from your Baptism! If you think the plague of your sinful nature is nasty and brutish now, imagine the havoc it would wreak upon you apart from Christ. If today you can only barely kill your old sinful flesh. If today you hear Paul's words to the Ephesians: walk in love, and find them difficult to fulfill. If today you still enjoy "filthiness and foolish talk and crude joking"—and you're a baptized believer in Christ—even if you *wish* those things gave you no pleasure. If today, no matter if you locked yourself up in jail cell without doors and windows and you still can't keep impure and sexually immoral thoughts, greed and covetousness, from running through your mind—imagine if you can for just a minute a world in which you were totally, entirely, completely turned over to the devices of your own sinful nature.

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You know, that's what Martin Luther discovered. He had fled what you and I would call a "normal life." Instead of living in his own family with his own neighbors buying his own food, running his own errands, being with the townspeople in the marketplace—a place filled with every sort of temptation—beautiful

women (even prostitutes), goods to buy and own, houses to improve, money to save. Instead of all that—and, in fact, to flee all that and the temptation that comes with it—he took a vow of celibacy, poverty, and obedience and lived a monastic life.

But guess what: it didn't work. As we see so evidently today with all the scandal that still ripples through the Roman Catholic Church, where even the vow of celibacy before God and Church cannot help priests lead a sexually pure and decent life. It didn't work. Martin couldn't free himself from his own sinful condition. He was stuck.

So were you.

Just like the demon-possessed man. But look. With the demon-possessed man, Another stepped in: the Lord Jesus Christ. And at nothing but the name and presence of Jesus Christ, the demon left the man.

That's exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ has already done for you. You have been baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. At your baptism, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the prince of demons, Beelzebul, was cast out from you: "I abjure you!" the pastor said, "Be gone, unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit."

And where you had nothing—absolutely nothing—but sin and death and a hell to follow it all, now you have Christ. The Stronger One who ransacks the house. Who casts out demons. Who buries your sin in His own grave so that it cannot have any hold on you any longer. Who has swallowed up all death in His resurrection from the dead so that on the Last Day all—not just believers—but everyone who bears and shares the human nature will rise. And who, for your sake, has ascended to heaven to prepare a place for you and all His believers. What was on you He took on Himself; and what was His, He gave over to you. All of it. For sin, righteousness. For death, eternal life. For hell, His heaven.

Just as He did for the demon-possessed man. Out fled the unclean spirit. And the heart? Filled with the Holy Spirit. Cast off, the chains on his tongue. And his mouth? Opened to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called him out of darkness into His marvelous light. And away the shrieks and terrors of demons. And his ears? His ears? Filled with the sweet word about Christ. But more on that later.

So that's lesson #1: Christ has done for you—just as He did for the demon-possessed blind, mute, and deaf man—what you could not do. He has rescued you from an intractable position and situation, sunken in the mire of your sin and sinfulness, and has set you on firm ground, one foot already in His heaven. That's the wonderful promise. That even through something as lowly as just plain old tap water taken in His name and at His command He has given you *everything* that is His.

Of course, such a gift is greatly despised. The work of Christ is called the work of demons and Beelzebul, the prince of demons. That's because Christ's work comes into direct conflict with the boot-strap theology of the Old Adam, who, before God can deign to save him must extricate himself from the mire of his sin and death. But that's not how God in Christ works or wants to work. He does it all. And He does it all for you.

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That's the beautiful promise. It's all Gospel.

But this episode and Jesus' teaching today comes with a terrible warning, too.

In your Baptism, the Stronger One has wrestled Beelzebul to the floor, kicked him out the front door onto the porch, and slammed and locked the door behind him.

But the devil is no fool.

And you so you shouldn't be, either.

Your Baptism was no magic act. Yes. It did what it did. It claimed and marked you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. It forgave you all your sins by the blood of Christ. And it opened for you the way to everlasting life. It did all that. What a gift!

But that gift is held in faith.

And faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Wherever faith grasps and clings to the word of Christ, there is Christ. There He has made your heart His living room. But wherever the Word is absent, so is faith in Christ. And wherever faith in Christ is absent, so is Christ. And the living room sits there empty. Everything neat and orderly. Lights on but no one home. Dust covers pulled over the furniture. The house of the heart in great danger. That's lesson #2 and the warning.

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Some of you may have heard this story. A few years ago I popped home midday. Our neighbors' house was for sale. They had bought it a few years earlier. It was a real fixer-upper. And they turned it into a really beautiful little place. So anyway there were people there apparently unloading a truck. A couple of guys in work clothes and a lady in nice business clothing driving an Audi. So I stopped. Said, "Hey! How are you? You must be the new neighbors! Welcome to the neighborhood." They explained they weren't the new neighbors, but they were there to pick up the fridge (which they were moving into their truck). So I said, "Oh, you must have talked to Zach. I didn't realize he was selling his appliances separately." And they replied, "We don't know. We're just here to pick them up for someone else."

Well, about 3 days later we were watching the 10 o'clock news and we got a rap on the door. It was our old neighbor Zach. He asked if we'd seen anyone at his house. We told him what we'd seen. And then he went on to say that his entire house had been plundered. All the appliances taken. The copper pipes and wiring ripped right out of the walls. And it was all done right before our eyes.

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There's more to the story. But this is the point:

An empty house is a house that's ready to be broken into. Plundered. Stripped. Taken over.

And a heart that has lost faith in Christ. A heart that has shunted aside the Word through neglect—not coming to hear God's Word or thinking little of it when here—that's a house that's ready to be taken over.

Pray the good and gracious Lord that never be you!

For the condition of that house is worse the second time around. This time it's not just one demon, but seven. We might speculate why. Are there seven instead of 1 because Christ had already claimed it as His own—and so the danger of losing it again is greater? Perhaps.

But whatever the case, it's a good, complete number. One might be able to be overpowered; watch out for seven.

But this is how it goes. The more the Word is spurned and despised, the harder the heart grows and the more entrenched its demonic occupants. The biblical examples are too many to mention. Pharaoh, anyone? How about Jezebel and Ahab? Or King Saul? Or Judas? Every one of them had Christ sitting in their lap, practically. They had His Word in all its truth and power. And some even followed for a time. Think of Saul and Judas.

Of course, you don't even really need biblical examples. You know of such people from your own life. Fellow-workers, neighbors. That's the warning Jesus delivers. Take care you do not despise God's Word lest your house be swept out, the dust cover pulled over the furniture, and the lights left on when no one's home.

If that's a good description of your heart, repent.

For right now, even now, the Stronger One would storm your heart. Right now, the Stronger One comes to you through His Holy Word and would take up residence in you once again. Right now, the Stronger One would assail your unbelief with holy Body and Blood. Right now, the Stronger One would drown your enemies once again in the water of your Baptism.

Right now. That's the meaning of Jesus' last word today. A woman from the crowd hearing such teaching from Jesus shouted out "Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts that nursed You!"

Blessed indeed was Mary, the one who conceived Him who was born without sin. Blessed indeed was Mary, who gave birth to the Stronger One, who storms His demon-possessed creation. Blessed indeed was the Virgin, whose Son would stomp Satan's head into the dust. We'd all agree.

But over all of that Jesus gives a crowning blessing: "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it."

Because the Word always brings with it Christ. And wherever Christ is, the demons must flee.

Amen.

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