

Power over the Demons

Luke 8:26-39

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

Like much of the Scriptures, today's text especially sticks out as something that makes us uncomfortable. Why? Because it's not just any miracle, but a *strange* miracle, right up there with the time Jesus took a coin out of the mouth of a fish, or the time Jesus cursed the fig tree that had no fruit. We gravitate to the miracles where Jesus heals or feeds a large crowd. We can sympathize with sickness or being hungry. But healing a man who wore no clothes and lived in the tombs and who was so violent and strong that no chains and shackles could hold him, and whose voice was possessed by another? Um, okay...maybe in the Lord of the Rings, but in the Bible? And that's precisely the danger of our 21st century.

Maybe we can also handle Jesus casting out one demon from someone, but a whole *legion* of demons, possibly even *thousands* of demons in this one man? And then once he was healed, the demons going into a herd of pigs running off a cliff into a lake and drowning? What's going on here? We never see anything like this in today's world, right? I know I've never heard of anyone running around naked and crazy in the local cemetery and possessing such incredible strength that not even the authorities could detain him. This can't be true, then, right? *Wrong*. Just because the world looks like it does today doesn't mean it has always looked exactly like this.

But note how the witnesses to this event also saw this as incredibly weird, to where they were afraid and told Jesus to go back from where he came. I can imagine we'd say the same in their shoes.

But for us it's weird in other ways. It rubs against our enlightened science-dependent minds. That's the part of our minds that doubts that a man could rise from the dead because we've never seen someone rise from the dead.

But what *about* demon possession? It's easy to write off the stories we hear today about people being demon possessed as those who are simply mentally ill or who forgot to take their medication. Whether those are true cases of demon possession is tough to know. But if we truly believe the inspired and inerrant Scriptures as historical fact --- and we do --- what are we to make of this particular man "*who had demons* for a long time" and does that mean demon possession exists even today?

The simple answer is yes. The Scriptures do indicate that a dark demonic spiritual realm does exist with Satan at its head, but God doesn't reveal too much about it. Perhaps that's for the better, lest we find ourselves tempted further into that darkness. We do know some about this demonic realm: that the devil roams about the earth like a lion, seeking someone to devour, so we would assume that his demons roam in the same way, or we know that the devil often orchestrates certain evils in our world to occur (working alongside the sinful nature of man), say, in our many shootings we hear so often about, or even experience in our own community.

That being said, we do well to remember that Satan isn't another god. You see, while it's dangerous to underestimate Satan and think of him as a fairy tale or only belonging to the folklore of Halloween, it's also crucial that we don't overestimate him. Yes, he does seek your destruction, and there's nothing good about the prince of darkness. To the almighty God, though, and for you dear saints in Christ, Satan is a mere pawn in the grand scheme of salvation. For Satan is a creature, a fallen angel. Though he is powerful, he is not *all* powerful. While he is smart, he is not omniscient (all-knowing). While there may be many demons, they are not

omnipresent. One of my former father confessors (which is the term pastors use to describe who they consider *their* pastor), he used to say (a bit tongue in cheek) that the devil himself is probably just headquartered in Washington D.C., merely managing the affairs of the demons. The devil is not omnipresent. While they (the demons) scratch and claw for whatever evil they're allowed to carry out, they are no match for the Word of God and the Word made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ. And hear this certainty: the devil and his demons cannot possess you who are possessed instead by the Holy Spirit. He may tempt by means of others he possesses, but as long as you are in Christ and Christ is in you, the devil and his demons cannot enter!

As for this Christ, the demons knew who He was. They knew what He would accomplish. He came to the country of the Gerasenes *already* having all authority and might over that demonic realm. The reality of the cross was the reality then and the reality now, that Jesus has all His enemies *already* under His feet. He's *already* won the victory over the devil and his angels. Because the Son of the Most High God had descended to earth, this legion of demons cowered at His sight. They knew their time was coming to an end.

Note how these demons possessing the man made it to where *nothing* could bind him because of their great strength. But just like Goliath was no match for David, so too were the demons no match for the Son of David. They who had all control over the man was put in complete submission to Jesus, even *begging* Him that He not send them to the abyss, their eternal destination. Jesus grants their wish to be cast into the pigs, and Jesus has the last laugh as the demons went to drown in the lake, a picture of the last day when the devil and his angels are cast into the lake of fire, where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Consider also that just as many refuse to believe the devil exists, so too do many refuse to believe that hell exists. It most certainly does, and the words the Bible uses – that Jesus Himself

uses – are no child’s play: a fiery furnace, where the worm does not die, and the fire never quenched, eternal torment where there is no rest day or night. But what we often forget about hell is it was never intended nor prepared for man, but alone for these demons and their leader, Satan. That a number of people still wind up there and suffer *alongside* these demons is not God’s desire, but the only thing left for those rejecting salvation for all mankind in Jesus.

But for you, dear brothers and sisters baptized and catechized into Christ, *that* is not your destination. Just as the legion of demons was no match for Jesus then, so also now are the legion of demons that roam around us no match for Jesus and those in Him. He confronts the demons for you through His Word, because He confronted them long ago. He battles the darkness now for you, because He fought, and won, against the devil and his demons on Golgotha. For Jesus’ death was their destruction. The Law that would otherwise condemn you in your sins and judge you the same as these demons instead was fulfilled in the life and death of Christ. He has conquered the demonic, and even descended into hell to proclaim His lordship and victory.

But keep in mind, O Christians, that the final punishment for the devil and his angels has yet to take place, as it will on the Last Day. The judgment is sealed, but the punishment is waiting. So Satan still roams the earth today, deceiving, and yes, still with his demons possessing certain unbelievers, and ready to pounce when we turn our eyes away from Christ. Resist him, *firm* in your faith. Know his tricks. Know the teachings of the catechism, so you may know how to defend against him: using Christ. That is, using the *words* of Christ.

The devil’s ways are subtle. He doesn’t seek for you to stop believing overnight, but seeks to whittle away at faith. He works to slowly get you to compromise your beliefs. He convinces you that certain gifts from God, like money, family, spouse are more important than God, or that the approval of those around you at work or school are more important than

remaining faithful to God and His Word. Consider how Satan has tempted you throughout your life. Consider how successful he's been to get you to do things your sinful nature actually wants to do.

Consider... and repent. Return to Christ. Return to your baptism. Remember how, like the possessed man in the country of the Gerasenes, you have been brought out of darkness and into His marvelous light. Remember that He sets you free from the devil's dominion, free from the sins that seek to rule over you. Remember that Christ at your baptism clothes your naked shame with the white garments of salvation. And like the man who was given back his right mind was found sitting at the feet of Jesus, you too sit at the feet of Jesus. Learn from Him. Learn from His Church. Study His Word. Study the Catechism and our Confessions. Take up the shield of faith to extinguish those flaming darts of the evil one. And having been set free from the hands of the enemy, return to your home, and tell what great things God has done for you. Notice how Jesus doesn't tell the man to go to a far-away land, but to return home. So it is with you. Confess your faith in your household. Talk about these things at home. And as you grow in confidence in Jesus' teaching, be emboldened to tell others these great things Jesus has done for you, that hope that you have within you.

That though we are powerless in ourselves against the devil, Christ isn't, and Christ is the one who possesses you. For He entered into our world and our flesh and our darkness in order to bring light and healing to you and all the world. He bought you back from the hands of the demons with his holy precious blood, and his innocent suffering and death. You are set free. You are forgiven. Christ has triumphed. He is risen. Alleluia. Amen.