

The Second Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 8:26-39

June 19, 2022

For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.” Lk 8:27–28.



Dear brothers and sisters loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Gospel reading for today from St. Luke begins with a naked man wandering around a cemetery. Who says the Bible is boring? We hear that Jesus and the disciples have travelled across the Lake of Galilee to another region called Gerasenes. Right before our text we heard about this journey, that as they were on the way across that lake by boat a big storm suddenly came upon them, and the disciples feared for their lives out on those waves. But Jesus was in the boat with them, and He spoke, and He calmed the storm. And the reaction of the disciples was fear. They were terrified. Who does this? Who speaks and the winds cease, and the waves stop? Well, in the Gospels, even as the disciples are trying to unpuzzle the question “Who is Jesus?” there are others who know the answer to question “who is this?” right away. Today we hear that even the unclean spirits

who afflict God's people and cause them such grief in the here and now know and understand what is happening. They know and understand that God has come in the flesh, and that the game is up for the devil and his minions. This man we see wandering around the tombs in a state of undress, he is not living that way because he wants to, he is not living that way because he was born to that kind of existence. He is there because he is in bondage to the enemy, he is there because he "had demons." And here, as is the case in many other instances, this particular earthly representative of the evil one, who has taken up residence in this man from a city in Gerasenes, gives up the game. He knows who Jesus is. He knows why He is able to still the storm, to calm the waves, to bring peace into the hearts of sinners, to still the ever present voice of condemnation in the conscience of those who stand before a Holy and Righteous God. Luke tells us: "When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?'"¹

We are hearing this story about a naked man wandering around a cemetery who is in bondage to the forces of darkness in order to bring to mind what we all have in common with this man. No, I'm not suggesting that any of you are out wandering around Lakeview Cemetery in a state of undress—well, at least I hope not, otherwise perhaps you need to schedule an appointment this week. What we have in common is bondage, for we are all born into this world as slaves to everything that stands opposed to God. We are in fact born as enemies of God,

¹ Lk 8:28.

unable on our own to make ourselves acceptable in His sight, without a leg to stand on, and subject to sin, death, and hell itself. When we encounter these demon stories in the Gospels there are details which sound very strange to our modern ear. The nakedness, the chains, the madness. All of these things show the utter cruelty of the demons who afflict this poor man. They also serve as a picture of the utter depravity and hopelessness of a life lived without the mercy and grace of God our Father. In our world I believe many people are hindered from crossing the threshold of a church because they view a life of faith in terms of what they will need to give up—self justification, self righteousness, self centredness—rather than in terms of what they have to gain: freedom from the slavery of sin. For those who are comfortable in their chains and unhindered by God’s Holy Word the stumbling block to faith is very great. Why do I need to do something different? I’m ok, you’re ok, I’m essentially a good person, I don’t rob banks or sell heroin on the streets. Lot’s of people are worse that I am. Look at my neighbour for example. Or those terrible people in the news. Or Vladimir Putin. But of course all of this misses the point. In the sight of God there is no difference, all are in the same boat, and you will never have an opportunity to prove that you might be a smidge better than someone else from an ethical standpoint. None of that matters. God’s Law stands unopposed by human rationalization. There are no brownie points for trying hard, or for positive mindfulness, or for wishful thinking. No, there is instead one overarching common denominator. There is instead only this condition into which all are

born, it's called sin, it's work is called transgression and iniquity, it's end result is bondage. So St. Paul writes to the Romans: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."² The man among the tombs was experiencing a living death, a life defined by his burdens and his defencelessness and isolation. So it is with all those who live apart from God and His holiness and His gift of mercy. This too is a living death, spiritually. So also it is sometimes even for those who are counted among those called and gathered into His Holy Church. Our own sins are always before us, and we can find ourselves isolated from other people and, so it might seem, from God. Where do we go? Where do we turn? The telling of this demon possession among the Gerasenes confirms to us the answer to those questions. Jesus is the One who releases sinners in need from their evil bondage. Jesus is the One who creates faith in the hearts of those who repent and believe at the hearing of His Word. In Jesus Christ, God is working, today, for you, His mighty acts of salvation. This miracle of the man among the tombs is an indication of this, and even more, it is the bringing of salvation in repentance and faith. Salvation from what? From bondage to sin, death, and devil, even for this poor man living with demon possession in a cemetery. Even for Gentiles. Even for poor miserable sinners like you and me. St. Paul reminds the Galatian church of this very message in our Epistle text: "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of

² Ro 3:10–12.

woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons [and daughters].”³

The identity of Jesus is the key to our Gospel reading today. The identity of Jesus is key to your life and the life of everyone. The demons declare the same thing that the angel Gabriel said to Mary at the annunciation: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.”⁴ Now the Son of the Most High sends the minions of satan out of this poor man and into a herd of swine, to be cast over the cliff and drowned. The fate of the unclean spirits is decided most appropriately in animals that were unclean to the Jews. The demons were conquered along with man’s defilement in the sight of God. The man was set free from bondage. All by the power of the Word of Christ. By that Word, which springs forth out of God’s mercy, this man is given new life. In an instant, all things change, for the better. When the people in that community hear about these things they go looking for the man and they find him made new again, a disciple, “sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.”⁵ And like the disciples who encounter the power of the Son of the Most High God in the stilling of stormy waters the first reaction of those people is fear. Who can do these things? What does that mean for me? How can this be good news, surely this is bad news? So fear leads to rejection, as it so often does. Those things I don’t understand, those things that threaten my false sense of security, those things that might force me to give up seeking my

3 Ga 4:4–5.

4 Lk 1:32.

5 Lk 8:35.

own redemption, it's all scary. So the people push Jesus away. We hear, "Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned."⁶

The presence of Jesus is met with faith by some, and with rejection by others.

Remember the parable of the sower? Even those who hear the Gospel can reject, or have faith choked off like a flower among weeds. And we must be clear: to reject Jesus is to reject what He brings, and what He brings is freedom from bondage, peace with God, salvation won for you in the laying down of His life, the atoning sacrifice on the cross. Let the seed of that Gospel take root among the weeds in this world that would choke out our faith, for "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."⁷

So let us remember that the story of the demoniac of the Gerasenes is also our story. Christ transforms us so that we are made new, clothed in His righteousness by virtue of Baptismal waters, and now here we are, sitting at His feet to hear His word and grow in discipleship. The Kingdom of God is in your midst. Your sins are forgiven because the Son of the Most High, Jesus Christ, has declared it so on the cross: it is finished. So we who are in Christ continue in that discipleship because only He has these Words, and we can't ever grow tired of hearing them. Having been placed into His care and grace we could never live again without the gifts He freely gives. Today you are here to receive those things by the means of grace that the Holy Spirit uses to deliver the goods—the preaching of Word, the

⁶ Lk 8:37–38.

⁷ 2 Co 6:2.

pronouncement of forgiveness, the very Body and Blood of our Lord and Saviour. And just as we can never grow tired of receiving these wonderful things, so we can never grow tired of sharing that this Word of the Son of the Most High God with those we encounter in our various vocations. Having been cleansed of His affliction the man in our text just wants to be with Jesus. Who can blame Him? But his community has rejected Jesus. They have walked away in fear. So Jesus tells Him, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you."⁸ Who did it? God, in the person of the Son of God, the Word Made Flesh who saves you.

What became of that message that he was sent to shout out? We don't know, St. Luke doesn't give us all that detail. Did God use it to plant faith into the hearts of hearers? Actually the response doesn't even matter so much from our perspective, for the proclamation of what God has done in Christ Jesus is always a glorious thing even if people won't listen. Here are two things to take with you today: number one is the reality of the bondage of sin, that the enemy still seeks to destroy the faith that you have received, and in so doing destroy you in body and soul. But secondly, and even greater, is the message that Jesus has conquered Satan and sin and hell itself on the cross, for your sake. Christ shed His blood and covers you with His righteousness. Yes, there are times you give into the temptation of bondage, which is the work of the devil, and are right back in those shackles. In repentance He brings you His forgiveness through the very Words

⁸ Lk 8:39.

that He speaks, for through the preaching of His Word all sin and evil are vanquished forevermore. Jesus is the one sent from God to all people, to bring salvation. By the working of the Holy Spirit in your life he sustains and builds you up in this life of discipleship, until that time when you will join in with all the saints in the banquet feast of the Lamb which has no end. Amen.

And now the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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✠ Soli Deo Gloria