

SERMON FOR SUN. JUNE 19 AND WED. JUNE 22, 2022

Pent 2C Luke 8:26-39 “Set Free”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by, and for Jesus Christ, while it is dangerous to underestimate Satan, yet we shouldn't overestimate him. He is powerful, but not all-powerful. He is smart, but not all-knowing. His demons are legion, but they are not resent everywhere.

Satan is real, but he is not another god, equal to and opposite the One true God, battling for this world. No. The devil is a creature, a fallen angel, and though he and his minions are active in this world and continue to rage and fight, they are no match for the Word of God.

The Word of God made flesh in Jesus came not just to order demons around but to set us free from them by His death and resurrection. To win the victory once and for all.

We are given a glimpse of Jesus' victory over Satan in the Holy Gospel that we heard today. In it, a man had been possessed by demons for a long time, but when Jesus arrives on the scene, the demons know the battle is over.

They fall down before Jesus, begging and pleading with Him not to be cast back into the abyss of hell, and finally, they are cast out - and the man, so long enslaved, is set free.

One trap we should not fall into is thinking that he is less active now than he was back then. As Hal Lindsay's bestselling book said, “**Satan is alive and well on planet Earth.**”

The Devil is still deceiving, still possessing people (although perhaps in more subtle ways like materialism, drugs and alcohol), still enslaving them to sin.

And he's still working on you and me, to rob you of your faith in Christ. Satan's goal is to get you to fear, love, and trust in **anything and anyone** but your Savior Jesus Christ.

Now, you might think, ***I would never turn away from Christ!*** I would never just stop believing in Him. And that, perhaps, is true, but do you want to find out?

Satan is not trying to get you to stop believing cold turkey; rather, he slowly but surely substitutes people and things for you to fear, love, and trust in more than God.

To slowly but surely get you to compromise your beliefs. To slowly but surely lure you farther and farther away from Christ.

And so maybe pleasing your spouse becomes more important than pleasing God. Or perhaps the approval of your friends and neighbors becomes more important than standing up for the truth.

And how often has fear driven you to do what you know is wrong? Fear of losing a friend, fear that your sordid past will be found out, fear that your plans for the future won't work out, fear that you won't have what you need. Fear is a powerful motivator.

And so, instead of living in the freedom of Christ and His forgiveness, we still live in the graveyards of past sins.

We are bound by the shackles of regret and shame, live among the tombs of anger and despair, enslaved by fear.

While we may look good and respectable on the outside, on the inside we all carry in our body the sin that leads to death.

And not just us, but all people are born in sin. Your family, your friends, your neighbors. How has Satan been working in their lives? What fears and shackles enslave them? Satan never takes a holiday. Under good-looking skin may lie a legion of demons.

Yet even a legion of demons is not enough for Satan to keep a person enslaved when Jesus comes to them. Jesus comes, as St. Paul told us today, **to set us free from our slavery to sin and make us sons of God.**

Jesus came to set us free from the shackles of our somewhat sordid pasts, our shame, our fears, our regrets, from the sins that seek to rule over us, from our unbelief and doubt.

Jesus set us free from all that by forgiving our sins and by making us children of God - not merely by adoption, but by **rebirth**. By being born again as a child of God in Christ Jesus.

That whatever you were - **Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female** - you now have a new identity: child of God.

Jesus came in accordance with God's will, **in the fullness of time**, at just the right time, to set us free.

Not by merely speaking a word to make our demons flee, but to break their grip on us once and for all.

Jesus came not in glory, but humility; being born of a virgin in a humble manger. He did not look strong, but weak. He came to be our substitute, taking our place as a slave - under your sin, under the Law, and endured a cursed death on a cross – all so that by His death and resurrection He'd set free all who are captive to sin and death.

And we have been! By His death and resurrection, Jesus has atoned for all your sin, stripped Satan of his power and any claim he had on you,

and broken the grip of the grave. And if your sin is atoned for, you are forgiven.

Furthermore, if Satan has been defeated, and the grave can no longer hold you - then you are free. You are no longer enslaved and shackled but set free to live.

And so what happened among the tombs that day, in the country of the Gerasenes, gives us a glimpse of what Jesus accomplished for you in His death and resurrection and that is what happens in Baptism.

For with the Word and promise of Christ Jesus, this water is no mere water, but the water when connected to God's word it becomes the tomb for your sins and death and demons

– where they are forced to flee and are drowned, and you are raised to a new life in Christ, reborn as a child of God.

Which doesn't mean that Satan will give up on you. In fact, he will redouble his efforts to avenge being robbed of his prey. Of that, you can be sure.

So do not underestimate him, but do not overestimate him either, dear Christian! For though he continues to fight, he cannot win because Jesus continues to fight for us here.

If we try to fight Satan on our own, with our own strength, wisdom, willpower, or anything in us, we will surely lose.

So no, not us, but Jesus. Always Jesus. Only Jesus.

His presence in His Word, and in His Body and Blood continues to throw down Satan and make him flee.

If we neglect these means of grace, we become weak and become more susceptible to Satan's wiles. And the Devil doesn't need much room to slither in and make his home in you.

But as you remember your baptism, confessing your sins and in the Spirit's power repent of your unbelief, then you are strengthened by your Savior's Body and Blood here for you then you are strong and victorious.

PAUSE

Now, not surprisingly, the man formerly demon possessed wanted to stay with Jesus and go with Him.

And many of us today would rather be with Jesus. We're old and tired and wonder why we're still here on earth when we can't do the things we used to do for our neighbors and ourselves.

Even St. Paul wished to depart and be with Jesus.

It would be easier, wouldn't it? To be free from the battles, free from temptations, free from the sorrows of this world . . . and be at home with Jesus.

But Jesus left the man where he was, telling him to “**declare how much God has done for you.**” The powerful Word of God would be spoken by this man formerly held captive.

And so it is with you. Since you have not yet been taken out of this world to be with Jesus, you are privileged to declare to others how much God has done for you.

And know that through the Words you speak, God is continuing His work against Satan, forcing demons to flee and drawing people to Himself. For the Word of God from your mouth is living and active, filled with the Spirit, and powerful.

And you know why that's important? Because the new life of Christ can be a frightening thing. We heard that after Jesus set this man free, the people asked Him to depart!

For they were afraid. . . . And we think: ***Afraid of Jesus? Why would anyone be afraid of Jesus?***

Sadly, many people have been taught that Jesus is mean, vindictive, and demanding.

And many are comfortable with their lives and the way things are. They're comfortable in their sin, and fit in with the ways of the world. They have no desire to change, or be changed.

It is like some slaves after the civil war. They had been set free, but freedom was frightening, so many decided to stay on the plantation as sharecroppers.

That's why you are so important. You who are the church, the body of Christ. You who have been set free and forgiven,

You for whom God has done so much.

Your Savior has put you where you are and not taken you to be with Him, that His powerful, freeing Word be both lived out in your daily life and proclaimed by you to all the earth.

So take what the life giving message you've learned in the church and take the church into the world – for the Words of Jesus continue to free, forgive, and save, and you'll be his means of doing for others what He has done for you. AMEN.