

June 20, 2010 Pentecost 4 Luke 8:26-29

On Easter morning, the women went to Jesus tomb to complete the anointing of Jesus' body as was the custom. Luke reports, **“they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down . . . but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He is risen!”** (Lk 24:4-6a). They were looking in the wrong place.

In Bible times, the extremely poor might seek refuge from the elements in the caves and tombs where the dead were buried, but it was only those who had come to utter hopelessness, in this case, the Gentile man possessed by demons. No right-minded Gentile wanted anything to do this naked, crazy, sorry excuse of a human being. The only ones with whom he had any fellowship or conversation were the spirits of the dead. He was living, if you could call it that, among the dead.

No Biblically literate Jew would have anything to do with him either. First, just because he was Gentile, and that made him unclean. The OT taught that **“whoever touches a dead body would be unclean for seven days,”** and **“anyone who enters a tent in which a person has died, will be unclean for seven days,”** and **“anyone who touches a human bone or a grave will be unclean for seven days”** (Nu 19:11, 14, 16). He might as well have had leprosy.

And yet, after Jesus had calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, He and the disciples sailed to the regions of the Gerazines, Gentile territory. Why would he do that? Because He had come to seek and to save that which is lost; to restore sight to the blind, and to grant release to the captives.

This man was held captive by thousands of demons. When Jesus asked the man his name, he replied, “Legion.” A Roman legion was a powerful force of 3-6 thousand foot soldiers and cavalry. He gave his name as Legion, since he had long ago lost his identity as one of God's creatures. Every aspect of his being had been taken over by the demons who drove him from town into the desert to live

among the dead. With one voice the demons cried out, **“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you do not torment me. (Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man.)”** The spirits repeatedly begged Jesus not to send them into the Abyss.

What have you to do with me? Don’t send us into the Abyss! That is exactly what Jesus had come to do – free the man of the demons and send the demons to their rightful place. When Jesus spoke of Judgment Day, He spoke of separating the sheep and the goats, believers and unbelievers. Of unbelievers he said, **“Depart from Me into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”** In the book of Revelation, Chapter 20 John wrote, “I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in His hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or satan, and bound him . . . He threw him into the Abyss, locked and sealed it over him to keep him from deceiving the nations . . .” The Abyss, or the Lake of Fire is hell, the destiny for satan and all the evil angels, or demons who rebelled along with him and were cast down from heaven. Christ Jesus is the angel who came down from heaven with the key to lock them there forever. And so they plead with Jesus not to send them there.

When the demons begged Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs, He granted their request and then the herd committed harry-carry and flew over a cliff and drowned in a lake. That is the last we hear of the demons. The man was now free of them and asked that he be allowed to company Jesus and His disciples on their journey. That Jesus denied, saying **“Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you,”** which he did, **“proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.”**

Jesus, the Son of God, entered the tombs of our existence to restore to cast out our demons and restore us to life. Seen any demons lately? I say that in jest on the one hand and in complete seriousness on the other. In our secular age with a scientific explanation for almost everything, we don’t hear much about demons, except that often we Christians are demonized when we oppose the secular agenda. In the secular world view there is very little room for God and for God’s

activity in the world. There's no room for satan or demon possession – it's a mental imbalance or illness. In some ways maybe the Gerasene demoniac has a leg up on us modern people. For him, spiritual warfare was a basic fact of everyday life as he struggled with the reality of demon possession. And because of that, he saw Jesus as the only answer and he told everyone he could about that Answer.

Perhaps we do not take spiritual warfare as seriously as St. Paul would have us do when he says, **“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places.”** And Peter warned, **“Be on your guard, for devil prowls about as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.”**

Let me ask you again, “Seen any demons lately?” Be careful or you might break the mirror! Have you in selfishness lost your temper lately so that it resulted in isolation from someone you love? As sinners we have our own demons that bind us and lead us to lives of isolation in the tombs of our own making. Satan and his demons are destined to the Abyss because they rebelled against God – that is really what is at the root of sin in our lives. Our loss of temper, abuse of others and abuse of things, our desire to use our own bodies, things, and people to satisfy our passions, are at the root, a matter of sin. Each one is a battle for the soul. If you think there is no such a thing as demon possession today then think of addiction to coke or methamphetamines and how it seizes control of a person's thoughts and actions so that they will sacrifice anything or anyone to feed their addiction. Think of what people will sacrifice for another fix, for another moment of passion, for power, for praise, for another drink, for another dollar. No such thing as demon possession, think again. We have all been possessed and would, to use Isaiah's words, still be **“sitting in tombs and spending the night in secret places,”** were it not for Jesus Christ . . .

. . . who has come into the tombs of our existence to free us from sin and death and satan. In His perfect life and with His sacrificial death, He has come to this

dying world and has conquered satan and is victorious over death. In His Word and Sacraments He goes out of His way to find us and lift us up and restore us to the land of the living. In Holy Baptism He washes us clean and clothes us with the robe of His own righteousness so that we are holy and acceptable to God. In the Lord's Supper we are seated with Him at the heavenly banqueting table with all God's redeemed children. Our identity is restored – we are members of God's household, through faith in Jesus, who holds the keys to death and hades.

The power of Jesus over the demons was graphically evident – these pigs don't fly, pigs floating belly up in the lake like armadillos sunbathing on the road. After the demons possessed the swine and they ran headlong over a cliff and drowned, the people of that region reported to others what Jesus had done. But the consensus was that Jesus should leave the area. As much as the man freed of his demons wanted to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn more about him, so others were afraid of Him. **“So he got into the boat and left.”** Some receive the Word of God and it produces great fruit in their lives. Some reject it and choke on it.

Why would anyone want Him who is the source of spiritual life and health and restoration, to depart? It is simply this: they do not want the name of Jesus to be proclaimed. The angel told Mary that the child born to her would be **Son of the Most High**. John the Baptist was called a **prophet of the Most High God**. Prior to our story another demon had already announced that Jesus is the **“Holy One of God”** (4:34) but now a demon declares that Jesus is the **Son of God the Most High**. The previously demon-possessed man proclaims what God has done. It is through the proclamation of the Gospel that demons are vanquished. Soon after, Jesus remarks to His disciples as they are returning after their preaching mission, **“I was watching satan falling like lightning from heaven.”** Preaching, narrating, proclaiming the Word of Jesus, the message of His life, death, and resurrection, conquers demons and sends them to the Abyss. They retreat at the name of Jesus.