

**Mark 9:14-29**

People, us included, tend to gravitate toward drama. When there is a wreck on the interstate, not only does traffic crawl where the wreck took place, the opposing lanes slow down because everyone wants a good look. St. Mark tells us that a crowd came running when drama was unfolding around a little boy. He was possessed by a demon. It would cause him to grind his teeth and foam at the mouth. It would send him into convulsions. It even tried killing the boy by throwing him into fire or water.

Maybe that's what we need here--some good old demonic drama to get the crowds of people running and pack our pews. But of course, that is no way to fill a church even though it would work. Jesus does not want His House filled with curiosity-seekers, with people wanting a thrill, with onlookers, with mere observers. God's House is not for those who want to watch what He does with demons in other people. It is, however, for all who struggle with the devil themselves; who wrestle with the captivating power of sin within their own hearts and lives.

God's House is for little Jacob. As is made clear in our baptismal liturgy, he came here this morning just as possessed by the devil as was the little boy in our text. That's why I asked him, "*Do you renounce the devil, and all his works, and all his ways?*" You could not see the devil actively possessing Jacob as all the onlookers saw him possessing the little boy in our text, but that in no way negates the truth. Everyone who is brought to Jesus in baptism--Jacob, you, me, everyone--comes as a child of Satan, possessed by him and under his power. But thanks be to God! As Jesus cast out the demon from that little boy, so today Jesus cast Satan out of Jacob, and in your baptism Jesus cast the devil out of you.

You did not see incredible drama unfold before your eyes here this morning because God does not permit it as He did in our text. And perhaps even Satan himself desires to leave quietly when he is cast out in baptism. Otherwise he may fear that throngs of people would come running to the church to be baptized if they could see with their eyes what his possession does to a person in his grasp. But do not be lulled to sleep. The devil works in the same way today as he did in our text. He kept trying to throw the little boy into the fire, his father said to Jesus. Satan has not changed his goal. He still works day and night trying to throw people into the fire of hell. That boy was helpless. He had no power to overcome the demon. And no one could help the boy, until Jesus came to him. And with a word, Jesus sent that demon packing.

All of you are not mere observers here today. You are in the fight. Satan has brought the battle to you. Just as the terrorists brought the battle to us on 9-11, so the devil has chosen you as his enemy. And we are not strong enough to defeat him. But you have One who fights for you. Jesus, in your baptism, sent the devil packing. He threw him out of your heart so that He, your Savior, could make your heart His home. Whenever Satan comes knocking, tempting you to turn away from the Lord and follow, instead, your sinful desires, remind him that the sign of the cross was placed on you in your baptism. You belong to Jesus now. He is your loving Master. It is His will, not your own, that you desire to follow.

Satan brought the battle to you, but Jesus stood in his way. He was stood up on a cross for you. Satan had to go through Jesus first if he wanted to get to you. But on that cross he was defeated. Jesus' death and resurrection gave the devil a fatal blow. Jesus won. He conquered the powers of sin, death, and hell. And because His cross is placed upon you in baptism, you have won. The victory is yours through Christ. The greatest terrorist--he who terrorizes all who are baptized into Christ--has no power over you anymore.

Yet, looking at how we live each day, it may be hard for us to believe this. Looking at how we struggle each day with our sin, with Satan's temptations, it may seem to others and even to ourselves that the devil has won, not us. That's how it seemed to the onlookers in our text. After Jesus cast the demon out, that little boy lay stiff and rigid like a corpse. "*He is dead,*" they were saying. And those same words are said about you and me. "They're dead...they're not really alive there at Christ Lutheran Church...look at how they live...look at their priorities in their lives...they claim to follow Christ, but we can see how they put Jesus second, or third, or even last...they're dead, spiritually dead." You probably have not heard onlookers say these actual words about us, but do we give them a reason to say them? Does the way you live cause others to say, as they said of the boy in our text, "he is dead...she is dead...they have a dead faith."

But the boy was not dead, for Jesus came to him, took him by the hand and lifted him up. And this is why you are here today. This is why God has drawn you here--Jesus is here to lift you up. You did not feel Him grab your hand earlier, but in truth He did. When I spoke the words He commands me, "*I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,*" Jesus was doing what those words declare. He was lifting you up out of your sins just as He lifted up the boy in our text. When you come up to God's altar in a few minutes, Jesus is here in bread and wine to lift you into life--the life you were given in your baptism. You do not feel Him, but He is here for you as He promises to be.

The onlookers are wrong. The observers are in error. You are not dead. You are not a corpse. You are alive, alive in Christ, for He Himself comes to you, as He came to the little boy, and He lifts you up; He raises you to life. Even Satan, when he tells you that you are no Christian, that you are dead, that you really do not belong to Jesus--how could you when you daily sin against the Lord? Even Satan is dead wrong; he lies to you. Friend, do not look at your sinful life. Not now. Not since Jesus took your sins to His cross and paid the price for them. Not since He lifts you up out of your sins through Holy Baptism, through His word of forgiveness, through His life-giving flesh and blood. Looking at our sins we would doubt our victory. We would wonder if the onlookers are right; if Satan speaks the truth, for we do daily sin much, we do daily live as if we were more dead than alive. But friend, you are forgiven. You are in Christ, and He is in you through baptism. His life is yours. His victory is yours. There is nothing more certain than this truth. No drama here. Just assurance, and comfort, and peace, and joy...for you now in Christ. Amen.