

Luke 8:26-39

Last week was the 40th anniversary of the movie, *“The Exorcist.”* It was Hollywood’s attempt to delve into the world of demon possession, scaring the daylight out of millions of viewers and making a bundle of money in the process. It was a movie loosely based upon a true story. One, in fact, which took place down the road in St. Louis. But while Hollywood took liberties, embellishing the story to make a profitable movie, Scripture does not. The story in our text is not loosely based upon actual events. It is stark reality. It was not put into the Bible in order to market it to a wider audience and create a large profit in sales. It is historical fact, true in every detail.

The story of the man possessed by demons may be terrifying to many, even though some have taken the escape route of declaring that Satan and demons are not real, but are simply the invention of man’s imagination. But for us who are baptized into Christ; who trust in His victory for us over sin, death, and the devil; and who cling to His promises by faith, we listen with a sober mind when the Scriptures speak about demons, for they are powerful and seek to destroy us. But our hope is in Jesus.

As He stepped out of the boat which brought Him, a possessed man met Him. We talk about having the flu, having cancer, having AIDS. This man, it says, *“had demons.”* It was no disease, but it became his way of life...or, better said, his way of death. He ran around naked. He lived out in the cemetery. He was so strong because of the demons that he would break bonds and chains. No one could capture him. A legion of demons lived within him. A Roman legion was 6,000 soldiers. Can you picture this man’s misery with that many demons dwelling inside of him! His life was not his own, but he was controlled by the demons. He would not have had even one minute of peace. These demons would have been constantly tormenting him.

And then Jesus comes. Crossing over by boat, He comes to where this man was dwelling. And now we see a complete reversal. This legion of demons who had been terrorizing this poor man cries out to Jesus begging Him not to torment them. How do you torment a demon? By forbidding it to torment man. Satan and his evil angels live for one thing, and for one thing only--to torment poor sinners, and to drive us away from Christ so they can torment us forever in hell. Demons are not happy unless they are making our lives miserable. And so what a wonderful day for this possessed man when Jesus stepped out of the boat. All 6,000 demons were forced to leave the man. Now he could live. Now he had peace and joy. All because of Jesus.

I’m going to pause here to ask, “How is life going for you?” You may say, “Well, I have depression,” or “I have financial troubles,” or “I have other problems,” or “I have cancer.” But can any of us say, “Not well, I have demons?” You are baptized into Christ. He drove Satan out of your heart. Jesus came to you in the water of baptism, stepped out of the boat, and told the devil to leave, and now Jesus lives within you. Some people speak about going through hell on earth. But when Christ is in us, and we are in Him, we don’t know what hell is. The man who had demons had a glimpse of hell. His torment night and day was horrific. And so when Jesus cured him of the demons, his response was to follow Him. Where else could the man go? He wanted to be with Jesus.

How very different is this man from all the rest of the people who lived in the city. They told Jesus to leave...all of them did. They did not want Jesus around. They wanted Him to get back in the boat and leave. We’re not told the name of that city in our text, but in truth it could be Anytown, USA. Our public schools do not want Jesus around. Nor do County courthouses. High School graduations forbid Jesus from being present. And there are even churches, supposedly Christian, who tell Jesus to “Get lost!” I have been to weddings, and funerals, Memorial Day services, and Baccalaureate services

where Jesus is not even mentioned. Our nation, our people, even those who call themselves followers of Jesus are looking very much like the city in our text--the city that told Jesus to leave.

But it's not just our nation and our people...it's us. You tell Jesus to leave, and so do I, when our daily schedule leaves His Word out, when our weekend plans revolve around ourselves and doing what we want, and not around His Word and Sacraments. We tell Jesus to leave when we are planning to do something we know is wrong. We tell Jesus to leave when we're so busy that we have no time for Him.

Yet, the man in our text was different. He is the only one who wanted Jesus to stay, who wanted to be where Jesus was. Wouldn't you, if Jesus had driven demons out of your heart and life? Well, He has. In your baptism, He has. And through His powerful Word, He does again and again. Satan constantly seeks permission to take control of your heart and life, but Jesus' Word is your constant defense. Is it any wonder that Jesus urges us to be in His Word daily, and at His Communion Table faithfully? Those who do not, who tell Jesus to leave by neglecting His Word and Sacraments, are inviting the devil and his demons to enter in.

But here is good news. Jesus' boat is here today. And Jesus has stepped out of the boat and has come to you, and for you. He is here by grace. He is not here to punish you for the many times that we tell Him to leave. He is here to do for you what He did for the man in our text. Jesus tells Satan to leave.

You are precious to Him. He died for you. He let Satan take Him on the cross so that your eternal soul would be spared. And He rose again on Easter Sunday to claim victory for you over the power of the devil. No matter how many times in your life you have told Jesus to leave, He is here now for you, and He forgives you. Every one of you He forgives. And as His words are being placed through your ears into your heart and mind, Jesus is guarding you. He guards you against the demons. He guards you against the sins of your past which Satan always digs up to haunt you. Your past is forgiven. Jesus says so. Nothing you have done matters to Him. His blood, shed for you, covers every wrong you have ever done.

And so live like the man in our text. Once he belonged to the devil, but Jesus set him free. Once he was controlled by sin and Satan, but then Jesus came. Jesus has come to you, my friend. He has come, and He comes to you now. You do not belong to sin and the devil. You belong to Jesus who loves you and forgives you. Now you have the joy and privilege of declaring this by how you live. Amen.