

Luke 8:26-39

Those poor pigs! There are some who, after hearing the story in our text, respond just like this. A man who is demon-possessed is released from his captivity. The demons enter a large herd of pigs, but they react by rushing into the sea, and all some can say is, "Those poor pigs!" Why not rejoice with the man who was set free from his demons? Why not marvel at the power of the Son of God over all the demons? Why not thank God that He counts one sinner of much higher value than a large herd of pigs? But no..."Those poor pigs!"

Those pigs were going to end up on someone's dinner plate eventually. They had no choice in this. Here at least they were given a choice. They could choose to live as demon-possessed pigs, or they could rush into the sea and be drowned. They chose the latter.

That's more than the poor man had. He did not ask for demons to enter him. He did not have the choice of living with demons or being rid of them. He was a complete captive. The demons chose him as their home. He couldn't say: "No!"

Come to think of it, that was us, wasn't it? You and I were this man before Christ. But as Jesus crossed the water of the Sea of Galilee to set the man free, so He crossed the water of Holy Baptism to set you free from Satan's captivity. The man did not ask Jesus to come. The voice of the demons within him, in fact, was telling Jesus to leave him alone. Nor did you invite Jesus into your heart and life. He came through the water by His choice. The voice of the devil within us was telling Jesus to stay away. But Jesus does not listen to the voice of demons. As He rebuked them and drove them out of the man, so with you, in Baptism He rebuked Satan and cast him out.

The only thing missing was the pigs. Maybe when we have a Baptism here, we should have a herd of pigs nearby. Wouldn't it be something to watch as a child is Baptized into Christ--the pigs going crazy and rushing away to be rid of their demons!

But demons prefer people, don't they? They will cause havoc however they can, but if it was up to them, they would enter into every single person living on the face of the earth. Thank God it's not up to them! Thank God that Jesus has authority over the demons! And thank God that He counts you of much higher value than anything else in all creation, and through Word and Sacrament He protects you from the millions of demons who want you.

There's another way in which you are like the man in our text. After he was freed of his demons we find him sitting at Jesus' feet. He sat there to learn, to grow, to be nourished by Jesus' words. This is such a small phrase in our text, but we dare not overlook it. When the townspeople came out, they "*found the man from whom the demons had gone,*" it says, "*sitting at the feet of Jesus.*" Six thousand demons had just left the man. There was a big vacuum in him now. Something or someone had to fill it. Jesus would fill it. As the man sat at His feet, Jesus' words were filling that big empty space within him caused by the departure of the legion of demons.

This is why you are here again this morning. Jesus meets you here week after week to drive the demons out -- those demons which keep dragging you back into captivity. Through His word of forgiveness, Jesus casts out all the demons, even as He removes your sins and their power over you. Something has to fill that empty space within you. If not Jesus, what? If you are not being filled up with the words of Christ, the devil will come back to you, and he will bring others with him, says Jesus.

This is what happened to all the townspeople in our text. It does not say that they were possessed by demons. But they sure were not filled with Jesus. They asked Him to leave. They wanted no part of Him and His words. So now that the herd of pigs was dead, where do you suppose those six thousand demons would go? There's an entire town full of people who just told Jesus to scram. I think we know where those demons headed for their new home. You can't tell Jesus to leave and expect the devils to stay away. If Jesus is not at home, the demons will gladly live there.

And that's why you are here--to keep the words and Supper of Christ filling you so that the devils leave you alone. There is nothing that can help a poor person who stays away from Jesus; who does not come here often to sit at His feet. The demons will grab him. They will fill his mind with misbelief, and then his heart with unbelief.

If you think the devils are no match for you, then go ahead and try it. Make worship a low priority. Close your Bible at home, and pass off as useless the opportunity to gather here with your pastor and other Christians to study God's Word. Make light of Holy Communion. And reject all efforts by the Elders and concerned members to bring you back to being a faithful member. See how long you last!

Is this really what you want - to challenge the devil and tempt God? It's not what your pastor wants for you, nor those among us who are faithful members. And it's not what Jesus wants for you. He did not pull you away from Satan in your Baptism to have Satan take you back later on in life. Jesus loves you too much. He died for you, friend. He went all the way into hell to bring you out of hell and give you a place in heaven. You are so dearly precious to Him. Even though you and I are rebellious sinners, Jesus loves you with such a great love that He never wants to let you go. Okay, so yes, you and I both, in the past have been less than faithful. Jesus forgives you. He's not keeping track of your sins. They're all washed away by His blood for you.

Here's what He wants...that man in our text wanted to go with Jesus, but He would not let him. No longer was the man filled with demons. Now, sitting at Jesus' feet, he was filled with Jesus' words. "*Return to your home,*" He told him, "*and declare how much God has done for you.*" There was a town full of people who needed help...Jesus help. But they did not want Jesus. So now, through this man, Jesus would work. The man was filled with Christ, with His teaching. Through him, others now would receive Christ. This former demon-possessed man was now a missionary in his own hometown.

Why not us, too? Here you sit at the feet of Jesus. He has forgiven you. He fills you with His words and with His own body and blood in the Sacrament. Now you are missionaries - in this way - you can return to your home and declare how much God has done for you. You have loved ones and friends who are not filled with Christ. You can help. If not you, who? If each one of us brought one person with us to church next Sunday, the angels in heaven would rejoice.

So you and I are like the man in our text in this way also. He wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus would not permit him. That man had work to do, as Jesus would work through him. And so we, too, are not yet permitted to go with Jesus. He crossed over into heaven, but our place, for now, is here in our hometown. We have work to do as Jesus is at work through us. But the day is coming when Jesus will come back, and then He will take us with Him.

There was an old man, some years ago, who reminds me of the man in our text in this way. He spent his life being filled with Christ. But now it was time for Jesus to come back. When the pastor arrived at his hospital bed, he noticed a chair pulled up next to his bed. He asked whether visitors had come to see the man. "That's Jesus' chair," the man explained..."I know that Jesus is here with me, so I have this chair pulled up close to remind me that He is always near to me." A few days later the man's daughter came to the pastor's office to tell him that her father had died. "He seemed fine," she told the pastor, "so I left for a few hours, and when I came back he was gone. It was a strange thing, though, that his head was not resting on his pillow, but on an empty chair next to his bed."

Friend, you are sitting in that chair, that pew. Jesus is near to you. He is filling you with Himself as you sit at His feet. Look next to you. Are there empty chairs...empty seats? Isn't it time to fill those chairs with loved ones and friends? Just like you, they are of much more value than a large herd of pigs. What Christ did, He did also for them. One day Jesus will cross over the sea again for you. Until then, there is work to do as Jesus works through you. Amen.