

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7C)

June 19, 2016

Text: Luke 8:26–39

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There is an old saying, “it’s gone to the dogs” which means something has really turned bad. Referring to a person, we’d say, “he’s gone to the dogs.” It used to be good; but now its quality and integrity have so deteriorated that it’s good for nothing except to be thrown to the dogs. If we were Jews, we might change that statement to “he’s gone to the pigs.” In the Jewish way of thinking, the pig was the ultimate symbol of something that was unclean, defiled, or even evil.

In today’s OT reading, for example, the Lord speaks to Israel through His prophet, Isaiah. God’s people had become a rebellious people. They were worshipping idols and practicing various forms of occult worship. Listen again to how their idolatry was described in Isaiah 65:2–4

²I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; ³a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; ⁴who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat pig’s flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels;

God’s holy people had gone to the dogs, or rather, to the pigs. They were offering up sacrifices among the tombs, meaning they were practicing some form of ancestor worship. Their idolatry led them to eat forbidden meat, pig’s flesh, which was expressly declared unclean in Lev. 11:7. God’s OT people were not even supposed to touch pigs according to Deut. 14:8. Things in Israel have truly gone bad, to the pigs.

The situation in Luke 8 has that same kind of feel to it; things are wrong, unclean. Jesus and His disciples have just arrived in the area of the Gerasenes, just east of the Sea of Galilee. This is Gentile, pagan country. And wouldn’t you know it, as soon as Jesus steps foot on this unclean, pagan land, “there met him a man from the city who had demons...” (vs. 27).

Yes, demon possessing is real. We don't know this man's history or how he came to such a dreadful situation. But he was possessed by anywhere from 3,000 – 6,000 demons. It's hard to imagine such doom and despair. We 21st century, technologically sophisticated, rationalistic, modern thinkers need to know that demonic activity is real; it's not something from the dark ages of man's past. This poor soul "had gone to the pigs" so to speak. From a Jewish way of thinking, it could not get any worse than being demon-possessed and living among the tombs (vs. 27) in pagan lands.

But Jesus isn't frightened by the situation. The demons are! Look at vs. 28, "When he (the demon possessed man) saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.'" The demons confess that Jesus is the Son of the Most High God. They know who He is and they tremble (James 2:9).

According to vs. 29, Jesus commanded them to come out of the man. They don't try to fight against Jesus' command; they can't. God has spoken. The demons know they must leave; this battle is lost. This sinful man will be released from his unclean bondage and corruption. What amazing, however, is that the demons appeal to Jesus' mercy. Don't send us to the abyss early Jesus. Don't send us to hell. Have mercy on us!! And so Jesus grants their request. And wouldn't you know it, they go to the pigs who had been feeding on the hillside. Seems fitting, doesn't it, unclean spirits going into unclean animals (vs. 32–33).

Dear saints of God, this is what sin does to us. It defiles our heart, mind, body, and soul. Have you ever felt unclean? Violated by your own sins or the sins of others? Shame, guilt, anxiety, fear, depression, bitterness, and resentment are the fruits of sin. And sin is the chief tool of the devil and his minions. On our behalf, Christ speaks His powerful Word, "Be gone!" And we are cleansed, set free.

As God's baptized children, we are not possessed by demons nor can we be. You are marked with the death and resurrection of Jesus through baptismal waters splashed upon you in God's Trinitarian name. But we are the focus of Satan's plans to destroy our faith, to corrupt our hope in Christ, to lead us to despair and other great shame and vice. Satan wants to take the clean, wholesome new creation that you are in Christ and make you unclean through prolonged exposure to sin, degradation, guilt, and shame.

Thanks be to God. Jesus takes the most unclean of the unclean and cleanses (Just, p. 365). Jesus makes the formerly unclean demon-possessed man clean and pure. Luke

provides a three-fold description of the cleansed man: 1) sitting at the feet of Jesus, 2) clothed, 3) and in his right mind (vs. 35). In the ancient world, a disciple would often sit at the feet of their teacher, listening to his wisdom and instruction. Jesus turns the naked, demon-possessed, tomb-raiding man into a Christian disciple. Jesus brings him into the holy Christian Church just as He did to us.

At some point, all of us were asked a series of questions when we were brought into the Church's communicant fellowship. One of those questions was, "Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways?" The answer given is "Yes, I renounce them." The confirmands is confessing before heaven and earth that all demonic, evil ways are renounced, forsaken, and abandoned. Christian discipleship quite literally means being transferred from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Jesus; that is, you sit at Jesus' feet as His disciple.

Once Jesus had released the man from demonic oppression, the man puts on clothes. Not only does he clothe his outer person – his body – but spiritually, he is now clothed with the righteousness of Jesus. Galatians 3:27 says, "for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Our spiritual nakedness is covered with the glorious garment of Christ's righteousness. Thus, we are pure and holy, saints of God covered head to toe with Jesus.

The man's mind is restored to wholeness. While living in the tombs, the man was quite literally out-of-his mind. Sin so corrupts the human mind that it becomes selfish, unable to submit to the things of God. But now, the man's mind is renewed. The apostle Paul encourages the Roman Christians to renew their minds (Romans 12:2), "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

This healed and cleansed demoniac now becomes the picture and icon of the Christian. You and I experience and receive the same cleansing, the same healing through the power and authority of Christ's Word. And the result is the same for we now 1) sit at Jesus' feet, 2) are clothed with Christ, and 3) are given a renewed mind and spirit.

One final point must be noted about this man's discipleship. According to vs. 38, he wants to follow Jesus wherever He goes. But the Lord has other plans for him. "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you" (vs. 39). Go

home. Be an evangelist to your friends and family. Go tell mom and dad, brother and sister, spouse and child, friend and neighbor all that Christ has done for you. Live in the cleansing of your baptism. Feast upon the forgiveness given to you week after week in the holy Body and Blood Jesus. Renew your mind in the inspired Word of God. Sing God's praises in hymn and song. Pray day after day especially the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer. Love your family and neighbors with the love of Jesus. Be who God the Holy Trinity created, saved, and sanctified you to be. Our God has restored you, cleansed you, renewed your mind, called you to discipleship, and has returned to you your dignity, your hope, and your eternal reward.

Once, our lives had gone to the pigs, so to speak. But no longer. We belong to Jesus. He claims you as His own. Nothing in all creation, neither height nor depth, nor life nor death, can separate us from the love of God given to us in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Once again, let us come to Jesus that we may sit at His feet, be clothed with the splendor of His righteousness, and be renewed in mind and spirit unto the joy of His eternal, resurrection life.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.