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Pentecost 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Demons You See and the Demons You Don’t”
Text: Luke 8:26-39; Galatians 3:23-4:7; Isaiah 65:1-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Some demons you can see.
Some you can’t.

Some demons you can see. Like with the man we heard about today, this fearsome man who wore no clothes, lived among the tombs, and exercised super-human strength, breaking chains and shackles. He was a wild man, and everyone knew it.

But some demons you can’t see. They lurk in respectable, normal places and people. Those who wear nice clothes, live in fancy homes, and have respectable jobs. Those who just want to live and let live. Don’t rock the boat. Like those who lived in the country of the Gerasenes.

And I say that because I want you to notice . . . what was the reaction of the clearly demon-possessed man and the reaction of the “normal” people who lived in that area? *Was it not the same?* Both were afraid of Jesus. Both didn’t want Jesus around. Both wanted separation - the demons begged to flee from Jesus, the Gerasenites begged Jesus to flee from them. They weren’t leaving. This was their country, and you’re not welcome here, Jesus. Not if you’re going to befriend people like that! Not if you’re going to hurt our economy. Get back on the boat. You’ve done enough.

Some demons you can see.
Some you can’t.

I often get asked why we don’t see demon-possession like in this story anymore. Perhaps we do but we’re just blind to it. Perhaps we do but we don’t think in those categories much anymore and so attribute anything out-of-the-ordinary to more rational, medical, acceptable causes. Christians in other countries report things like this, what we heard today . . so maybe demons work in different ways in different places at different times. Hiding at times, fearsome at times. I wouldn’t be surprised at that. Whatever it takes to get you in their grip. To destroy you. To destroy or prevent you from having life in Christ.

So in our day and age, are there not those who, like that man, wear no clothes in our super-sexualized culture? And billions (yes, billions with a “b”) profited by those who do so. Are there not those who live among the dead in our culture which so often sees death as the answer to the problems of the world, be it war, genocide, suicide, assisted suicide, mercy killing, or abortion? Are there not those who act like mad men among us, instilling fear with their rantings and ravings?

And are there also those who don’t mind Jesus, don’t mind Christianity, don’t mind the Church as long as it stays in its place and doesn’t rock the boat? As long as my income, my pleasures, my wants and desires, my comfortable life aren’t affected? As long as I don’t have to change; as long as I don’t have to be around “those” people . . . I mean, if we let *them* in the church, what will “respectable” people think? Then they won’t want to join!

Some demons you can see.
Some you can’t.

So how is it with you? What demons are you battling? And don’t look at others! I mean, in you. What sins, what temptations have you in their grip? What part of your life is Jesus not welcome in? I’ll follow then, and there, for that, but this part . . . no I really don’t want you there, Jesus. I don’t want to change that. I don’t want to give that up. Get back in the boat, Jesus, if that’s where you want to go in my life.

Think about that, hard as it might be to do so, **and then repent of it.** Of that thinking, of that attitude, of those sins. For of the demons you can see and those you can’t . . . Maybe the ones that can’t be seen are worse. They’re easier to get away with and live with.

But Jesus sees them all.

In the Rite for Private Absolution, we say this: *Let us begin in the name of God, to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hid.* You might look good and respectable to the world, and maybe even to yourself, but Jesus sees what we cannot. So we might as well come clean. He knows anyway! And when we come clean, when we come for cleansing, that’s the very thing He has come for. To wash us clean, to forgive our sins, to set us free, and to give us a new life to live. Like that man so long oppressed. There could not have been a greater change. From ranting and raving to sitting, from naked to clothed, and from crazed to in his right mind.

Thy Strong Word (LSB #578), did that. The strong, Spirit-filled, bringing-everything-from-nothing, forgiving Word of Jesus. That Word now here *for you*.

For Jesus has come here to you - not in a boat across the Sea of Galilee - but in His Word, to set you free. From the demons and sins that can be seen and from the demons and sins that can't. The demons and sins that are so destructive in your life, that hurt faith, family, and friends, that isolate and separate, that cause sadness and fear, that cause you to hate others or to loathe yourself. All of it Jesus has come to forgive, to set you free from, and to give you a new life to live.

And He *can* because He *did*. Jesus took all the sin and shame that's weighing you down and making your life less than it should be - He took it all to the cross. That it crush Him, not you. So that you rise to a new life with Him.

So to free that man so long-oppressed, at His word, Jesus allowed the demons to enter a herd of pigs. And I sometimes wonder: did the demons cause the pigs to rush into the sea and drown? Or did the pigs rush into the sea to try to get away from the demons? Anyway, we have water, too, that drowns us and set us free from our demons - **the water in the Font**. But this water is greater, because here we die and rise with Jesus. The pigs just died and drowned. But for us, at Jesus' word, the old sinful man in us is drowned and a new man emerges and arises to live a new life.

And now it is *we* who sit at Jesus' feet, listening and learning, clothed with His righteousness, and with a mind made right, thinking according to the Word of God. And while maybe we would rather depart and be with Jesus, it is more necessary for us to ***return to our homes, and declare how much God has done for us.***

And one of the best ways we can do that is by speaking His Word of forgiveness. The greatest thing Jesus has done for us. How much damage has been caused by grudges, hatred, bitterness, and division because we refuse to forgive? But it is exactly Jesus' forgiveness that gives us a new life to live, unhindered and unhampered by the shackles and chains of sin and shame that seek to keep us captive and drag us down.

Better is to forgive. And if you can't, if you have trouble doing that, come here and receive the forgiveness you need to give. Be washed again with His Absolution, eat and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus that won and gives this forgiveness, fill up with His words and life, and then go and declare how much Jesus has done *for you*. *Give us lips to sing Thy glory, Tongues Thy mercy to proclaim. Throats that shout the hope that fills us, Mouths to speak Thy holy name* (#578 v. 5). And I guarantee you, that even though it may not feel like it, what Jesus has done for you is far more and far greater than you will *ever* do for others.

And yes, there will be those who don't want your forgiveness, who don't want Jesus in their life. *Get back in the boat*, Jesus. Go back to where you came from, Christian.

Leave us alone. And Jesus did. And though I don't know, I'll bet, I'll just bet, that the next time Jesus went off by Himself to pray, He prayed for them. That one day He could do for them, with their demons that could not be seen, what He did for the man whose demons you could.

And so we pray. For ***Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, female*** - all people. For God desires *all* to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). That's why ***in the fullness of time . . . God sent forth his Son . . . to redeem us . . . that we might receive adoption as sons.*** That we cry out, ***Abba! Father!*** and live new lives, forgiven, set free, and raised up as children of God.

Or as we prayed today: *O God, You have prepared for those who love You such good things as surpass our understanding. Cast out all sins and evil desires from us, and pour into our hearts Your Holy Spirit to guide us into all blessedness* (Collect of the Day).

Do that, we pray, O God, until that day when the demons you can see and demons you can't are alike thrown into the abyss, never to return.

Until that day, lead us, guide us, strengthen us, help us.

Until that day, bring us to repentance and the joy of Your forgiveness.

Until that day, protect us and preserve us, for without You, we have no hope.

Until that day, feed us at Your altar until we feast with You forever.

Some demons you can see.
Some you can't.

Thank God we have a Saviour who is greater than them all.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.