**Sermon f or Proper 7-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

06-22-25

Luke 8:26–39

Jesus comes into Gentile territory, and casts unclean spirits into unclean animals, costing the animals their lives, but saving eternally the life of the man who had suffered so much at the hands of those demons. Demons only seek to kill and destroy; thus, the fate of the herd of pigs.

Notice that, possessed by evil spirits, the man dwells not among the living, but among the dead. Such is our own spiritual state, apart from faith in Christ. Such also is our life, apart from faith, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

 Unless and until we are reborn; converted; made a disciple of Christ, then, even while we are living, we are dead, and our lives find no real purpose.

 We live for empty things that, briefly, validate us, distract us, and entertain us, but do not fulfill our deepest needs.

 We expend our energies, straining toward empty accomplishments that die with us; and then what do we have to show for ourselves before the face of the Lord our God?

 The answer is, nothing; nothing but our guilt; nothing but our unclean, filthy lives, worthy only of eternal death. Apart from Jesus, we are naked. All of the shame and disgrace of our sins lay exposed before God.

 Satan, the great accuser that he is, not only encourages our sinful thoughts, words and deeds, but then, when we sin, he pounces upon us, to point out our nakedness, and declare how disgraceful our sins are, shaming us, directing our gaze away from the cross of Christ, and causing us doubt our salvation. Don’t listen to him; listen to the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead, who is the Spirit of truth.

Our spiritual rebirth through baptism clothes us in Christ’s righteousness. It makes us disciples of Jesus, and gives us the Holy Spirit, who works within us a new will, with godly desires.

 It is our responsibility to live in our baptism, and be renewed and refreshed in it, through a regular diet of Word and Sacrament.

Satan and the rest of the demons, only seek to destroy and kill. They hold nothing but hostility toward God’s good creation, and especially toward mankind, the crown of God’s creation, and the reason why God created everything in the first place.

 The entire creation is meant for our use and enjoyment, and we are called to give thanks always to God for all that he provides for us.

 But, since mankind’s fall into sin, our nature is given to selfishness, to the misuse of God’s good gifts, and to thanklessness.

 What’s more, Satan and the other evil spirits constantly aggravate and manipulate our fallen nature, encouraging us into ever greater depravities, unto our eternal damnation in the torments of hell.

 We would be at the mercy of Satan and his minions, if not for the love of God in Jesus Christ. The Lord’s desire is that none would be lost, but that all would have eternal life. So, the only begotten Son of God comes into His broken creation, in order to save it.

The demons immediately know who Jesus is, and that He’s come to cast them out into the outer darkness, hell, forever. The demons know that Jesus is Lord; that he has complete authority over them.

You who are in Christ have no need to fear the demonic, for you know that Satan has been defeated, and that Jesus Christ, in holy baptism, has marked you, and made you His own, giving you the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and the Holy Spirit Himself.

But, Jesus doesn’t force Himself on those who don’t want Him around. Those who witnessed Jesus cast the demons out of the man, and allow them to enter into the herd of pigs, testify to what they have seen.

The people are in great fear at this incident, and likely focused only on the loss of the herd of pigs. But, where is the joy over the fact that a tortured soul has been released from its affliction, and now enjoys the peace of God, which passes all understanding?

 Because of Jesus, this man gets to return home to his loved ones, gets to live a productive life, and never has to fear the torments of demons in this life, or the torments of hell in the next, ever again. This local townsman has, practically speaking, been brought back from the dead. Jesus should be welcomed as the Savior that He is; but instead, the people ask Jesus to leave, for they are afraid.

 Even today, many people get mighty uncomfortable in the presence of Christians, and of God’s word. Their response is coldness, hostility, or simply “please leave.” They don’t want to hear it. They don’t want to be around it.

As an example, people pass by our parish every day of the week. It’s no secret that we’re here. In fact, I often hear compliments about how pretty our church is, and yet, those same people never join us for just one hour on a Sunday morning. Why?

Yes, in many cases, it is because they already have a church home. But for many others, it is because, until the Holy Spirit, working through God’s word, awakens faith in one’s heart, God is only the scary judge, whom they must somehow appease or suffer punishment; not the loving Father who only desires their well-being.

 They have no concept of a Savior who willingly comes to suffer God’s righteous judgement in their place, who has, through His own innocent life, suffering and death, made them innocent before the eternal Judge.

 So, they remain, like Adam and Eve, naked and afraid, enslaved to sin, and to Satan himself.

The man healed of demonic affliction testifies by his words and his life what Jesus has done for him; that because of Jesus, he has a new life, and peace. After Jesus saved him from demonic torment, he wanted to leave his home and be at Jesus’ side.

 But, Jesus sent him to live his life, among his people, as a witness to them of all that God had done for him. He went about telling everyone what happened to him.

That man told the people in his life about God who loves us and saves us from hell, not because we are worthy, but because we are loved by our Father, the one, true and living God, who created us to be his, forever.

Apart from Jesus, all of us are under the sway of our sinful flesh. We may not be demon possessed, but, apart from saving faith, we are still Satan’s plaything. Jesus Christ, through His word, gives to us spiritual rebirth and renewal.

When we are in Christ, a new spirit dwells within us. As we grow and mature in the faith through Word and Sacrament, and the encouragement of our brothers and sisters in Christ, our fallen nature has less influence on us, and the Holy Spirit has more.

 As a result, we are not so easily caught up in sinful things, nor easily swayed by Satan’s deceptions. We look at the cross of Jesus Christ, the crucified who, through His own sacrificial death, has already broken Satan’s chains from us, and so, we are no longer slaves to sin, or to the devil.

You belong to Jesus Christ. You are a ransomed child of God the Father, and Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, who has freed you, brought you back into God’s house, and has promised to never leave you, nor forsake you.

As you await Christ’s return, and eternity in paradise with Him, Jesus sends you into this fallen, hurting world to live your life as a witness to those around you of all that God has done for you.

 May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your heart and mind in Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.