

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU

Luke 8:26-39; Proper 7C-Pentecost 2C; June 21-22, 2025

Green is the color of life and growth. With the rain we've had lately, everything is lush and green, grass and weeds alike. Having sufficient rain is necessary for plants to grow and bear fruit; too much rain and things will be drowned and die. We have entered the time in the church year which focuses on growing and maturing faith in Christians. The green color of the paraments reflects this. The Readings in church, especially the Gospels from Luke the next five months, focus us on the words and works of Jesus Christ so that our faith in God will be "watered" and "fertilized" to grow and mature to bear fruit, in this life now and for eternal life in heaven.

Our Gospel Reading today from Luke eight is the familiar account of Jesus crossing the Sea of Galilee to the region of the Gentile Gerasenes where He encountered a man possessed by demons. When Jesus commanded the demon to give its name, the demon replied, "**Legion,** for many demons had entered him." (Roman military legions had 4,000-6,000 soldiers in them.) The poor man was overwhelmed and completely controlled by these demons; he was possessed, that is, owned body and soul, by them. Today we hear how Jesus came to free and save us from demons.

I'm not sure that I've ever encountered anyone possessed by demons, though it certainly still happens. When it occurs, specially trained pastors called "exorcists" are brought in to cast out those demons in Jesus' name. *Luther's Small Catechism* reminds us that every time we pray the Third Petition of Lord's Prayer, "**Thy will be done...**" we are asking God to "break and hinder every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature," and pray in the Sixth, "**lead us not into temptation,**" that "God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice."

The devil and his evil angels, demons, are real and continue to wreak spiritual and physical destruction in this fallen, sinful world. Their time is short because Jesus has come in His kingdom and has overthrown their rule, but they are seeking to restore it, or drag down to hell as many poor souls as they can to suffer with them.

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Jesus saved a man possessed by a “legion” of demons. Jesus came to break the power of evil, which He does also for us when we are baptized **“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”** The baptismal rite we use reminds us that, “we are all conceived and born sinful and under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation” (*LSB*, 268). The Alternate Form for Baptism in the *LSB Agenda*, based on Luther’s Baptism Rite, includes the traditional exorcism at this point: “Depart, you unclean spirit and make room for the Holy Spirit” (13).

Jesus cast out a legion of demons from the man and they entered a herd of pigs which they drove into the Sea and were drowned and died. We died and rose with Christ in the waters of Holy Baptism. Still being sinners, our Old Adam needs to drown and die daily by contrition and repentance. We remain in a daily battle against the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh.

The devil wants us back, but we have Christ on our side, and the devil can’t have us. With God on our side we have the victory. James in his Epistle encourages us to have confidence while in this fierce fight: **“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you”** (4:7-8a).

The sign of the ✠ cross is drawn on our heads and hearts in Holy Baptism. God had given us new minds to think like God thinks and new hearts to want the things God wants for us so we can live by faith as His own children... and the devil can’t stand this. God in Christ Jesus has saved us from all that would destroy us. The blood of Jesus God’s Son cleanses us from all sin. God washes us clean of sin in the water of Holy Baptism, He declares us forgiven in the Absolution, and we are given Jesus’ body and blood to eat and drink for forgiveness, life, and salvation. God has done great things for us by saving us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. I don’t think we always appreciate this like we should.

The man saved from a legion of demons wanted to go with Jesus after the other Gerasenes fearfully asked Jesus to depart from them.

How should we respond in faith knowing and believing what God has done for us in Jesus? What Jesus said to the man saved from demon-possession He says to us. **“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.’ And he [the saved man] went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.”**

Something I want you to notice – especially since last week we celebrated Trinity Sunday, that there is one God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and Three Persons in one God, the Holy Trinity – is how Jesus states that it was God who saved the man from the demons. **“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.”** Jesus’ disciples had heard the demons confess (though without faith) before being cast out that Jesus was **the Son of the Most High God**. Jesus is God’s Son and God is Jesus’ Father. And when the man went home Luke says that **“he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.”** Jesus is one God with His Father and the Holy Spirit, who worked true faith in the man. Jesus and God are the one.

This is the God who saved us. This is the God we believe in and confess, as we did this earlier in the Nicene Creed. We proclaimed to each other how much our God has done for us: The one God, Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, has saved us through the one Lord Jesus Christ, and we have faith in this God by the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. It is good and right for us to proclaim how much God has done for us here in church and in our homes.

The man Jesus saved from demons, **“went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.”** He was excited to tell everyone around him what God in Christ had done for him. God had done great things for him, and he wanted everyone to know that God would do these great things for them too.

Do we proclaim this Good News throughout this city or whatever city, town, or countryside we live in? Why is it that we are afraid, feel insecure or incapable of telling others, family, friends, or strangers, about Jesus? We have excuses: I don’t know what to say. I don’t want to say the wrong thing. Isn’t that the pastor’s job. Or whatever.

We will have opportunities to tell others what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. With joy and confidence, we can proclaim: how He died and rose for us; how He cast out an unclean and unbelieving spirit in us in Baptism and replaced it with the Holy Spirit to believe and become God's children; how He gave us new minds and hearts to think like Him as we hear His Word and want what He wants for us; how He has forgiven all our sins and keeps forgiving our sins; how He brought us into a family of believers in the Church whom we can serve in love and who love and support us; how He will raise us from the dead like Jesus rose from the dead to live with Him forever.

God has done great things for us; we have a lot to tell others.

Before Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee that day, the demon-possessed man had no hope and no future. He was enslaved by the demons and stripped naked to live alone among the tombs of the dead in the desert places. Jesus freed him from his bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil, clothed the man in His own righteousness that comes by faith in the true God, and brought him into the living community of God's family, the Church. Jesus told him, **“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.’ And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.”**

Jesus has done basically the same things for us. What should we do? The old hymn reminds us:

*Oh, that I had a thousand voices
To praise my God with thousand tongues!
My heart, which in the Lord rejoices,
Would then proclaim in grateful songs
To all, wherever I might be,
What great things God has done for me. (LSB 811:1)*

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Amen.