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Propers 7 (Pentecost 5) Series C 2016

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Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, June 19 (Proper 7, Father's Day)

We have heard some amazing things about Jesus since the Feast of Pentecost. Jesus raised the dead man in Nain, restoring him to his mother. From that story we might hear and believe that He is the Lord of Life. Last week, Jesus was seen to be the solver of another great foe, our own sinful self as he forgave the sinful woman and we heard that in the context of David's forgiveness as well. From this we might hear and believe that Jesus is the forgiver of Sin. That leaves one member of Luther's deadly trio of enemies, Satan. This Sunday, the last of that evil cadre is vanquished by Jesus. Jesus, having conquered Death and Sin, today tackles the Devil, the sole remaining item on Luther's famous list of foes. In casting out the Demons from the Gerasene man, Luke establishes Jesus as the one who is the solver of our deepest and most profound problems. Not merely as a doctor might treat the symptoms of our distress, but going to the very root of the problem, to the serpent who first tempted our forebears and under whose domination the world has groaned since that day.

That is the story which the Christian has to tell. Jesus is much more than a friend or a wise man doling out advice. While some of what he does is therapeutic, to think that he is simply offering therapy for our condition is to miss the point. He is Life, the defeater of Satan, the resurrection of the dead, the forgiveness of sins. There is no problem which is larger than his love or his power.

These readings will also connect this reality of Jesus to our evangelistic mission. Evangelism has been described as one beggar telling another where he can find a hot meal. We have sometimes turned this simple conversation into a strange and mysterious science. Worse, looking at the statistics of Synod and our own congregations, we have beat our poor parishioners upon the head telling them to go out and evangelize. And when they don't we tell them that they have failed. But too often such admonitions leave them feeling far more guilty than motivated. This is a tragedy.

Evangelism is much more akin to sitting down on the bus or standing the elevator with someone and talking about the good restaurant or movie you enjoyed over the weekend. That is not hard to do, especially if the restaurant or the movie really was something that you truly enjoyed and would like to share.

The struggle that many people in North America today have with evangelism is they really don't have a good story to tell. Their experiences of Christ's body, the Church, are too often tales of conflict and decline. They do not see their fellow parishioner as a gift from God, who has been sent there to forgive my sins. They do not perceive the tasteless wafer that is pressed into their hand as the very body of Christ, the gift of life itself. Perhaps because the modern enlightened world has told them that the devil is a childish illusion, they do not marvel at the rebirth of their baptism and protect it affords them against the assaults of the evil one.

So, we spend our Sunday critiquing the music or planning our afternoon or next week. The council and voters assemblies and committees too easily become venues for the exercise of

power and not the organization that helps me share this amazing, good thing that has happened to me. Is it because, if pressed, I would find it hard to call my Church and Christianity a good thing? Is it because we have lost sight of the threat of sin, death, and devil and hence we have lost any appreciation for the fact that Jesus is that Savior from those very threats? Have we been cursed with success? Does our relative wealth give us a crutch so we can hobble through life stubbornly insisting we can do it ourselves and don't need Jesus? Have our medical victories over diseases and pain removed the specter of death from our life? When my body hurts, do I turn to opiates or to Christ? Is sin simply another issue I need to bring to a therapist or perhaps a chemical reaction in my brain that the right drug might stop? (I understand they are closing in on such a drug which would stop the chemical cascade we experience as anger.)

We call Jesus Savior? Perhaps our church is even named "Our Savior," but what does he save us from? What do we have to say to the fellow human being whom we meet? If they asked what "our Savior" has saved us from, what would we say?

I don't know that I have answers for all these questions, except to say that I believe we, as a Church, need to regain the sense that Jesus has indeed saved us, helped us, and done something really important for us. The Church and my congregation is not a social club nor a good habit nor a means to give my life a little extra meaning and purpose. It is not an organization with bylaws and a constitution which we will tinker with at the convention this summer. If that is the church we are all in a great deal of trouble. The Church is the very body of Christ; it is the instrument through which that Savior works today. Our message is not that going to Church is a good idea or that it is a noble thing. Our message is that you need Jesus or you will die miserably and suffer torment at the hands of an evil spirit whose pleasure is in your eternal pain.

Collect of the Day

O God, You have prepared for those who love You such good things as surpass our understanding. Cast all sins and evil desires from us, and pour into our hearts Your Holy Spirit to guide us into all blessedness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

God has prepared for those who love him... – there is a mine field in that verse, one into which many a Christian has stumbled. When you come to this sort of a statement, even in Scripture, it is critically important the preacher remember an important distinction between objective and subjective justification. Objective justification states that Christ died for all, equally, without making distinctions. It is the basis of all preaching.

Subjective justification is when you start talking about individuals, this man, that woman, etc. Any time you distinguish the saved from the unsaved, you are in the realm of subjective justification, whether you hold to the idea that this is by faith alone or by faith and works or even

works alone, you are in the realm of the subjective. It is true, God has prepared great things for those who love him, but the great thing is his love for broken humanity. That is given to all, objectively in the blood and death of Christ.

This prayer is asking God to act in the relationship he has established with us, and would establish with all humanity. Heaven has blessings we cannot even imagine. The struggle really is in that the identification of the recipients is on those who love God. This is true, and a good thing to talk about in this regard and on this day, but it has the potential pitfall that some might hear this as a form of “I put the love in, the blessings come out...” We must be clear here: The love is response to the love of God already given. In fact, as Paul said in the reading last week, it is Christ who lives in me. The love is Jesus at work in me.

The first blessing which the prayer notices is that God removes all sin and evil desires from us. Again, the preacher will want to have a care when these issues come up. I know a woman who is a Christian, but has had multiple divorces. She is a member of the Four Square denomination and they have this really odd Third Great Awakening idea that the true believer will not have sinful desires anymore. They may inadvertently sin and still need to repent and seek forgiveness for such sins, but they hold that they will not want to sin. True conversion means that you are freed from such desire. Divorce being a rather intentional act, especially when you initiate it, as she has, has resulted in something of a crisis of conscience for her, every time. Thus, she has also been baptized four times at least in part because her desire to divorce her previous husbands. I actually hurt for her, how precarious is that relationship with God? As long as she feels holy, she is OK with God, but as soon as she has seriously stumbled, all her prior religion is declared to be a falsehood and a lie. It wasn't a real conversion, or she would not have wanted to sin. Now she must begin anew.

I imagine that when we get to heaven, if we are allowed to reflect on this life on earth, the greatest changes we will notice will be those which are internal to ourselves. Yes the lion will lie down with the lamb and there won't be any funeral homes in heaven, but even more significant for me will be the changes that I perceive in my own mind and heart. I simply won't want the same thing anymore, I won't feel the envy and the jealousy when my neighbor succeeds or worse, the secret glee at his failure.

If God casts out the evil desires and sins from my life, I honestly have to wonder what will be left? Will I simply be an empty vessel, vacuously wandering around the streets of gold and the eternally lit avenues like some celestial zombie? Here is where it gets beyond our understanding. God not only pulls out the crap, but he puts something in there, and the thing he puts in there is really Jesus himself. I will love with his love. This will in fact be far more exciting than the sinful excitement Hollywood portrays for me.

He pours out the blessing of the Holy Spirit who guides me. This is the really strange part of all this. God doesn't suck out the sin and evil desire, he pushes it out. He enters our lives with his love and slowly, inexorably, and finally drives these things out, replacing them with his love. Lutherans, being somewhat Augustinian in this, believe that there is a great deal of work that

needs to be done in this life. We look forward to this final cleansing in the resurrection. Others think it moves along a little more quickly. We can disagree about that, but the real question is who is doing this. On that Christians agree: God is doing this.

Perhaps this is a time to preach about Baptism. We have allowed this element to atrophy in our liturgies, but all baptismal rites at one time included an exorcism. Today we simply renounce the Devil and all his ways and works, it used to be much more fulsome. Every Christian has been exorcised of Satan in Baptism. Paul is also helpful here. The old man continues to live in that old kingdom of this world and its prince. Only in resurrection will Christ free us from this situation as he raises us from death to eternal life in his kingdom.

Readings

Isaiah 65:1-9

I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me;

I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me.

I said, "Here I am, here I am,"

to a nation that was not called by my name.

² I spread out my hands all the day

to a rebellious people,

who walk in a way that is not good,

following their own devices;

³ a people who provoke me

to my face continually,

sacrificing in gardens

and making offerings on bricks;

⁴ who sit in tombs,

and spend the night in secret places;

who eat pig's flesh,

and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels;

⁵ who say, "Keep to yourself,

do not come near me, for I am too holy for you."

These are a smoke in my nostrils,

a fire that burns all the day.

⁶ Behold, it is written before me:

"I will not keep silent, but I will repay;

I will indeed repay into their lap

⁷ both your iniquities and your fathers' iniquities together,

says the LORD;

because they made offerings on the mountains

and insulted me on the hills,

I will measure into their lap
payment for their former deeds.”

⁸ Thus says the LORD:

“As the new wine is found in the cluster,
and they say, ‘Do not destroy it,
for there is a blessing in it,’

so I will do for my servants' sake,
and not destroy them all.

⁹ I will bring forth offspring from Jacob,
and from Judah possessors of my mountains;
my chosen shall possess it,
and my servants shall dwell there.

¹⁰ *Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks,
and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down,
for my people who have sought me.*

¹¹ *But you who forsake the LORD,
who forget my holy mountain,
who set a table for Fortune
and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny,*

¹² *I will destine you to the sword,
and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter,
because, when I called, you did not answer;
when I spoke, you did not listen,
but you did what was evil in my eyes
and chose what I did not delight in.”*

I included the next several verses which I thought completed the thought and perhaps are also worthy of hearing. Do we sometimes strive to emphasize the Gospel to the exclusion of the Law? Is that really Gospel then? The next verses suggest that God is plenty upset here.

You can almost hear the hurt in God's voice as the prophet recounts these words. God is standing there with arms held out, but the rebellious child that is Israel turns away from him to pursue pleasures of its own devising and destruction.

In Isaiah's terms these people break the covenant. They do not make their altars of stone as the Torah prescribes, but they make them of brick. They do not eschew the dead body but sit in tombs, pondering death and the Lord of Life. They eat their ham sandwiches, they work on the Sabbath.

It gets even worse in verse 5. They insist that they are too holy for God.

What is one to do with such a people? Careful how you answer that, for we speak of ourselves here. God will pay out their just reward, for all their idolatry. Thank goodness this is not the end

of the story. The cluster of grapes that has some good in it will be saved, the remnant which has not succumbed to pest or rot will be saved. God will bring forth offspring for Jacob and Judah. He will not destroy them all.

The preacher will want to ask what it might be that we have done to make God feel thus? We are often “terribly right” about what we believe, but what good is that, especially when the past is littered with the spiritual corpses of those whom we have smashed in our rectitude? Isaiah points to the worship life of his people. What would God say about ours? Is it filled with the holy joy and passion which befit a person whose great debt has been forgiven? (Remember last week’s Gospel lesson?) I fear that we are not in any position to look down noses at our Israelite forebears.

How do we say that we are too holy for God? How often haven’t we told God to take his Word somewhere else, we have better ideas? The liberals tell him that when it comes to social issues which swirl around sexuality and various “rights.” Folks on the other end of the spectrum have quite often assumed their doctrinal or theological rectitude exempts them from the divine mandates to care and love the other and themselves. And perhaps it is not about the spectrum of theology or politics, perhaps it is just our culture. Do we make our ‘sacrifice’ a stench in God’s nose through a form of idolatry, putting even something good like family ahead of God? Do we ask God’s worship to take a back seat to our soccer schedule or the vagaries of our entertainments?

What is the hope here for us? It has to be found in the “despite” which is found in the last verses. God has every reason to obliterate his people. The list of valid reasons is long and damning, but his mercy simply overwhelms the hurt and the sense of righteous anger. He will find some way to make wine out of this mess. This of course has a great segue for the preacher in a Lutheran Church. It would be out of humanities greatest affront, its most ignoble deed, as it put to death the one sinless man who ever lived that God made wine, the very wine which is given us in this sacrament, which restores us to the right relationship with our creator and redeemer.

Psalm 3

O LORD, how many are my foes!

Many are rising against me;

² many are saying of my soul,

there is no salvation for him in God. Selah

³ But you, O LORD, are a shield about me,

my glory, and the lifter of my head.

⁴ I cried aloud to the LORD,

and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah

⁵ I lay down and slept;

I woke again, for the LORD sustained me.

⁶ I will not be afraid of many thousands of people
who have set themselves against me all around.

⁷ Arise, O LORD!

Save me, O my God!

For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.

⁸ Salvation belongs to the LORD;

your blessing be on your people! Selah

The psalms are divided into five books, likely a deliberate imitation of the Torah. The first two psalms seem to be a preface to the whole collection, at least many who study them think so. That makes this the first psalm in the first book of psalms. As such it sets the tone for this whole section of the collection. What emotional ideas do you think he is trying to convey here? How does he describe God?

Galatians 3:23-4:7 I have included the verses which fall between last Sunday's reading and this week's selection from Paul's letter.

¹⁵ To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. ¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. ¹⁷ This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

¹⁹ Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. ²⁰ Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

²¹ Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. ²² But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

4 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything,² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

This passage is tremendously important for the understanding of why we do things. Notice the discussion of faith and Jesus in vs 23ff. Notice that all this falls under the question that Paul asked in vs 19 as well. In vs 23 we are enslaved until faith comes, in vs 24 Christ comes and we are released. Is faith then Christ? It would appear that Paul is using the terms, faith and Christ, interchangeably here. Try reading the instances of faith as Christ and vice-versa. This is bolstered when on remembers that in 2:16 the actual Greek of the text says that we are justified by the “faith of Jesus.”

Now as many of us as have put on Christ, or have put on faith, remember they are the same thing, we are all sons of God – we have the faith of Jesus, we are all in the same relational place with the Father. We may with Jesus call him “Daddy!” which is what “Abba” means.

We may toil side by side with the slaves, those who try to earn something from God by their deeds. We may in fact look just like them in the fields of this world, even with those who go by the name Christian. But the critical difference for the Christian who has heard and believed what Paul says here is found in the heart. What we do, we do for love. We are sons of God. Just as the son may be out in the field picking grapes with the slaves, just as dirty and sweaty as the servants, so to we are out doing much the same thing as the folks who working for all the wrong reasons. The man who gives a million dollars to the hospital so they will name the wing after his wife is looking for glory. But that does not mean we eschew generosity on that account. In fact, our relationship to Jesus may mean that we proportionately give even more. It is likely that the million dollar donor gives from his excess and we from our poverty, because we love God.

And please don’t fall into this silliness of suggesting that we are “sons and daughters of God” That has serious problems. In the ancient world a daughter did not inherit like a son. To call someone a daughter was to admit that her standing in the law was not the same as a son. Even today, very few men will change their names when they get married, that is still the expectation of the bride. Likewise there is still much talk about glass ceilings and marble ceilings and other barriers that are set before women. Whether one likes it or not, these are still facts. Paul is making a radically equalizing statement here when he calls us all sons. Just read verse 28. There is no male or female, we are all sons, we are all heirs equally of the kingdom. When we say that we are sons and daughters, we are suggesting that there are two categories for children of God. Don’t do that!

How shall we preach this marvelous relationship and what is the law against which we preach here? It seems that our human nature really only understands the relationship of the law. We like

it, it works in our everyday dealings, and we think it is the only way. But Paul is proclaiming a wholly other motive for our deeds and the living of our whole life. It is a freedom which he proclaims, a freedom which still serves, but do so for a very different, liberated reason. We are the sons of God.

The preacher will want to notice, but do so briefly, a very important fact about this relationship of a son to God. First of all, parents make children, it is not the other way around. This is even more evident in the case of an adoption, but equally true in the case of a naturally born child. God establishes this, I don't, any more than some orphan in an orphanage makes his family come true by wishing for it. It takes people willing to adopt him or her before he/she has a family. The real point here is that this relationship is truly free and therefore more potent.

So notice the power and joy of this relationship. This motive for working beside the slaves is powerful and much stronger than any fear of the lash or the promise of some reward. This loving motive is born something divine which God has planted within us. It is a mystery and we will want to talk about how we will preach this on Tuesday. We can point to folks for whom this drive to serve God has led them to fantastic heights. It was no promise of reward or fear which pushed MLK to stand up for Civil Rights, or Mother Theresa to advance the cause of the poor in Calcutta. They were serving God in tremendous love. I always say that the power company will get a lot of money from me, because they threaten to cut of my power if I don't pay. But they won't get a dime more than that bill says I have to pay. It ends right there. But my children and the people I love get far more from me.

How else can we illustrate this because this is a piece which demands illustration. Perhaps the woman anointing Jesus feet last week or the demoniac in today's reading, or even the psalmist today.

Luke 8:26-39 (Jesus creates deviled ham)

This account is preceded by the Parable of the Sower in Luke. I have also included the account of the crossing of the sea in which Jesus calms the storm. It would seem that Luke has a message about Jesus' strength going here which the reader and preacher does well to note. Preacher may also want to notice that this account is followed by the story of Jairus and the resurrection of his dead daughter.

²² *One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out,²³ and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger.²⁴ And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm.²⁵ He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"*

²⁶ *Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.²⁷ When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had*

worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. ²⁸ When he 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.” ²⁹ For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. ³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. ³² Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

³⁴ When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. ³⁶ And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷ Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ “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.

A Roman legion had at full strength 6000 soldiers in it, most of the time, however, the legions only operated at partial strength, averaging just over two thousand.

You may want to look up the same account in Mark 5. The reader who compares the two telling of this event will notice that these are very similar, at points word for word, and at other points things are left out. For instance, the demoniac in Mark’s account is noted for cutting himself with sharp stones and some rather ghastly behavior. The demons had stripped this man of all his spiritual gifts and left him nearly an animal. But in Luke he is not nearly so “inhuman” in the portrayal. This actually runs a little counter to Luke’s usual method. Usually he is much more thorough in his portrayal of the suffering component of people. Luke also tells the story in a much better Hellenistic style. For instance, he notes that there is a town nearby early in the story so when the people come rushing out from the town, it makes sense. In Mark’s account one is rather surprised at the end to learn that there is a town close by. They are both effective, but different.

This is a very good story, and perhaps the successful sermon will simply slow down and tell the story in modern day terms. The swineherds have undergone an economic catastrophe. Back it up and connect it to the question that the disciples asked at the end of verse 25. Who is this Jesus? Do we connect this man who is in the grips of a demonic force with the many whom we may know who are in the grips of the forces of an addiction or some other reality from which they cannot escape? Is this another example of this language of forces which we used earlier?

This story is perhaps one of the most famous exorcisms. There is even an old Star Trek episode which plays off the legion of demons. But the preacher who comes to this text has a challenge. The Post-Enlightenment Christian, even the conservative Lutherans to whom we likely preach, don't really live in fear of the demon or the demoniac. We will fight the modernist who wants to turn this text into a mental health issue and resolutely insist that demons are real and this is a real exorcism. But our guts are not wrenched at the thought of them and the hair on the back of our necks does not rise, nor do our palms get sweaty. Luther's words in "A Mighty Fortress" about devils that fill the world seem like hyperbole to us, a fine literary image, but not something we really feel is part of our world. I remember a young woman from Nigeria who took a class from me a number of years ago. This topic came up and she was evidently disturbed by the memory of her recently deceased grandfather's spirit haunting the house in which she had lived as a little girl in Africa. The rest of the class was not able to get their minds around what she was saying. For them her fear was not sensible.

But is that because the demons have left, we have changed, or something else is different? C. S. Lewis insisted in "The Screwtape Letters" and elsewhere that the apparent disappearance of the Demons was simply a tactic on Satan's part. Lewis thought that Satan found it easier to lull the modernist into believing that the demons were not there at all and that made them much easier to deceive.

This belief that the spiritual realm is not real does strange things to our theology. Recently, (Pentecost Day, 2013) Pope Francis caused quite a stir by laying his hands on a young man presented to him and conducting what looked like an impromptu exorcism. There was much debate about what exactly happened, and to his credit, the Pope refused to tell anyone. It wasn't any of our business what he did for this young man. The fact that so many were surprised at this says one thing about us. But a much more telling thing may come from another source. About the same time, the presiding Bishop of the U. S. Episcopal Church preached a sermon based on Paul's exorcism of a demon in Acts from a young slave woman. Her message was that Paul had, in a fit of patriarchal power mongering, denied this young woman her spiritual expression. It is not that great of a leap from denial of the demonic to the endorsement of demonic possession as an alternate form of spirituality. We would not want to be judgmental, after all.

So what will we do with this? This account of Jesus casting out the legions of demons is a great story, but it also has a number of important themes within it. The demons are numerous, in fact they are a legion of demons. In the ancient world, the Roman legions had conquered everyone who had met them. No army could stand before them. To have a legion of demons was an especially terrifying prospect. Jesus rather handily deals with them, even able to show them a little mercy, casting them into the swine instead of out of that place. It seems that a common feature of such demonic presences is that they are tied to a locality. It is either that spot or hell's dismal prisons for them. This is common not only in cultures which are influenced by the Bible, but seems to be generally true. I have heard that it is so for Hindu demons too. When there is a demonic presence, it is not really mobile. It is not like these demons could simply relocate to

Tahiti or something like that. Thus when Jesus drives them out, if they did not have a place to go, they would have to enter the prison of hell.

The pig thing doesn't work out so well for them, however. The swine are driven insane and over the edge of the cliff into the sea, a picture in many Jewish ideas of chaos and hell itself. The swine herdsman, aware of the economic ramifications of this sort of thing, seek help from the local townsfolk who are terrified at what they see: floating pigs were bad enough, but even more fearsome also the demoniac in his right mind and sitting clothed at Jesus feet. This is simply too much for them. They ask Jesus to leave. He does.

This is a story of Jesus' mastery over the greatest enemy of all. Mark will use this as part of a triplet about the mission of God's people to tell the good news and such a theme is not absent here, but Luke seems to be talking much more about power and authority here. It is interesting that the demoniac's witness in Luke does not result in everyone marveling as it does in Mark. Luke just leaves it there. The man went out and told. Luke is much more interested in the contest between the demons and Jesus than in the demoniac and his mission to the people of his community.

This actually does pick up on one of Luke's themes. Luke is very interested in questions of power and authority. Jesus is the ultimate authority. He wields the greatest power and authority. Even though he is careful to notice who is in power when Jesus is born, he is also careful to notice that his kingdom transcends all of these. The preacher who comes to this text will get a chance to hit Mark's evangelism text in two years, but this one is about the scope of Jesus power and authority.

Of course, Jesus' power is good news for us. He has compassion on the demoniac. He is rejected by the people of the Gerasenes but he does not reject them.

Is this passage in Luke the kicker text that connects all of these readings for us? Isaiah speaks of God working through a remnant of a thoroughly sinful people. Paul notes that the salvation of God has turned us into a different sort of person, the sort of person who does what God asks for a totally different reason. This text illustrates Isaiah's promise and Paul's theology and does this beautifully.

Jesus encounters a demoniac, and not just your run of the mill, garden variety sort of demoniac, but this is a dilly of a demoniac. He has thousands of demons, he breaks chains, he lives in the tombs (did you catch the OT connection there), and he is absolutely unmanageable. This guy is frightening.

Jesus confronts the evil, an evil before which we are powerless, and that demonic evil owns up to that fact that Jesus is a superior power, its true albeit hated master. The demons beg mercy of him (does he grant mercy even to the demons?) and finally at his word flees from his presence into the pigs (unclean) and from there into the chaotic waters of the sea, an ancient symbol of hell itself. Jesus victory is complete.

The man now cleansed of his demonic possession would come with Jesus. If you have ever had experience with a demoniac you know that they are not nice people. They destroy their own family and all relationships. They are vile, foul, and most difficult to get along with. They are cruel and poison all human relationships. The worst of it is, that this fellow, once healed, realized what he had been. The devil delights not in an automaton, but in corrupting our wills and minds so that we participate with him and delight in his foul pleasures as well. Even though he had been possessed, the man still could not say, "The devil made me do it," because he had in fact done it himself. He does not want to confront that at home or in his village. He wants to flee. Wouldn't you?

Jesus will not have it. The exorcised man, the liberated demoniac, is, in the image of Isaiah, the remnant of humanity in that place. He is the one man who knows the power of God and the love of God together. He may be the only true human being in the whole town. Jesus sends him out as the first apostle, the first evangelist. He is to go and tell the story of what has happened to him. And he does. Former demoniacs make pretty good evangelists. They have a downright amazing story to tell to the rest of their community which is just as much in bondage and slavery as he was; it is just a little harder to see. What is more, they are so used to these chains they have convinced themselves that they like it.

What of today? What is our Jesus story to tell this benighted and fearful world?

Law

1. I and the rest of humanity are in a state of rebellion against God. We have taken sides with His enemies.
2. God has great power and even the demons tremble before His wrath. What hope can I have?
3. I am stuck in this rebellion. Even in my best acts, even in my worship and my service, I would claim glory that does not belong to me and set rules as if I am in charge. I cannot free myself of this, any more than I can name myself a son of God.
4. Like the children of Israel in Isaiah's day, I feel the pain of my sin's consequence. Like the demoniac in Jesus' day, I find myself in the charnel house of sin and death, under the cruel servitude imposed by my satanic master. I am helpless before this.
5. Even if I claim today that I am Christian and have been freed from Satan by my baptism, why then do I continue to suffer so, do such wicked things, and feel so miserable about myself? Does Christian baptism and the life which follows look any different than the unregenerate life?

Gospel

1. God loves his creation, even his rebellious creation. He sent Isaiah to tenderly call them back to himself and hear his promises of life. He stands with hands outstretched to his rebellious people and even their repeated rejection will not turn his love to apathy.
2. God puts his power to use on our behalf. He loves us. The Babylonians are routed, the demons are cast out, so that he may save us.
3. God does not wait for us to turn to him. His love has prepared for us great mercy, and then he seeks us out. He sent Isaiah, he encounters us in our demonic worst, and he frees us from that scourge.
4. Jesus joins us in the grave, he died too. He knows the lash of Satan's whip, wielded expertly by a Roman soldier. He has broken death's door and Satan's chains with which he imprisoned us and the rest of this world. His method is odd, it is not the violence we might expect, but as a father loves his children, he lovingly and tenderly works in our lives.
5. And thus, though we might long to see these distinctions, we find ourselves slaving beside the rest of the world, toiling in the slave gangs of humanity. But our toil is not the meaningless and drudgery of some thrall. We are serving God when we share the cup of water, we are

Sermon Themes

1. Heirs of the Promise (That the Holy Spirit would move the hearer to joyful service rendered to a loving heavenly Father.)

We have seen Paul get angry already in this series. He has gotten personal. Last week he argued the point of the Gospel – to say that we have earned this simply contradicts the facts. This week Paul wants the hearer to see that this Gospel truth changes everything. It turns the whole world on its head. Paul wants to completely upset the traditional relationship which people have had of God, the relationship which still is the natural default position of human beings. In Paul's day people were used to being creatures, servants, even slaves of the Gods. There were sons of God, of course. They had their Hercules and Achilles sorts of heroes, but they belonged to mythology and did not live in my world.

But Paul extends that title, "Son of God" to everyone. It transcends every imaginable barrier. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. Even the Scythians get a spot in there. You might want to play with that one, actually. In the first century, Scythians were the latest barbarian horde to threaten the north-eastern boundary of the empire. They were fierce horsemen and the Romans were afraid of them. Paul says Jesus died even for them. They too are sons of God. If you want to get a sense of this happening today, look up the story of Pr. Gottfried Martens at Trinity in Berlin. Here is a

link: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/why.many.muslim.migrants.are.embracing.christ.even.if.this.is.not.needed.for.them.to.stay.in.germany/70297.htm>

But for Paul this son-ship is not a static sense of being something and that is the end of the story. For Paul this son status is lived out. Much of chapters five and six will explain what he means in greater detail. This week he wants to establish that we really are sons of God, no longer slaves, no longer under the rod of our tutor. (You may want to explore the role of a tutor in ancient Greece, they really did carry a rod and they used it!)

But being out from under the tutelage of the law does not mean we suddenly are set loose with nothing to do and no accountability. Paul speaks of a greater but more joyful responsibility. Now we are serving in our own house. We are heirs. Once we were slaves, toiling for a god who demanded our service. Now we are His sons serving our own father. That does not mean we do less, we do so much more.

The slave, motivated by the lash, will work hard as long as the eyes of the foreman are on him and the threat of the lash is over him. But walk around the corner, get out of the sight of the one wielding the punishment, and his motivation to work evaporates. The son, however, does what he does for very different reasons and even when the master is not looking. He works hard, perhaps harder than the slave, because it is his own inheritance he serves. He loves his father and joyfully toils beside him in the field. It is his field too after all.

(Now, we all know that I am painting this as a fairly rosy picture of families. There are many families where sons and fathers have great tension. Don't dwell on that, but don't ignore it either. This is the divine family, perhaps imagined more than experienced, but it is a family in which people really do serve one another out of love.)

We are heirs of the promise – God has, in Jesus, delivered the Kingdom of Heaven to us. Just at the right time, Jesus came under the Law to redeem all of us slaves, to adopt each of us as sons. It is true, this is not a natural thing for us. We were not born to us. We did not deserve it. We have no claim to any right to pray the “Our Father.” But that hardly changes the fact that God did just that. He gave it to us.

Paul's image of a family is perhaps still the best one. But the creative preacher might also want to explore others. Why do people do amazing things? Why does the man go down to the local school and tutor struggling children in how to read? Why does the woman volunteer at the homeless shelter or build houses at the local Habitat for Humanity site? Surely the motives are always mixed in sinful human beings, but Paul says that for Christians, there is something more than self-interest involved here. There something of the Son of God peering out at us from those eyes. The carpenter of Nazareth may be wielding the hammer at the building site.

But this goes also for the everyday sorts of things. Why do we care for our neighbor and our own family members. Is it just because it is a habit or because they have helped us

out in the past? I hope and pray not. It is Jesus inside us. Why do we drive carefully or buy groceries for our children? Are we afraid of the policeman who would ticket us or the family services types who would charge us with neglect? Really, is that why we do that? Or do we love our fellow human being and especially our children? Do we spend that money joyfully because Christ has grabbed at least a corner of our hearts? I think so. The preacher will want to work on this. Paul is reorienting the whole world for us. To be an heir of the promise means we see and do everything differently now. God has given us life and heaven itself. He has called us his very sons. How will I live that today?

2. Jesus conquers all our foes! (That the hearer would believe that he/she has real and potent enemies who would do us harm, and also believe Christ has conquered those foes on our behalf.)

This sermon really has its work cut out for us in the first part of this goal. Since the enlightenment, we have made a joke of the Devil, consigning those who actually believe in His reality to a mental institution. But we are decidedly in a minority in the Christian world today. There are three times as many Lutherans in Ethiopia today as there are in the whole LCMS. They all believe in the reality of the Devil. In fact, when they hear this passage about a man with a legion of demons, they probably wonder how many demons the scary guy they saw on the street last week has. For them, the world is filled with spirits.

But we of the industrialized west live in a post enlightenment time. We have lost that sense of a world filled with spirits. And that does strange things to our theology. Our first inclination with such a text is to put it far into the third person, historicize it. We wonder if he was mentally ill, or, more likely for us and our people, we think that such demonic possessions were real then, but not now.

This sermon will want to tentatively and gently challenge that idea. Our goal is not to make them afraid and manipulate that fear into something. Nor are we seeking to simply return to a pre-enlightenment mindset. Christ has been good to us. Our Baptism has worked and we are blessed not to be tormented so. But I have to wonder if the Devil has not grown much more sophisticated and hidden himself behind other things. Is he just as active, but perhaps much more successful since we have reduced him to a figure whom we jeer at in his red suit and pointy tail. Has he ceased to be something we fear and has that made us all the more gullible and vulnerable?

The case can be made, and I think needs to be made that people who stop believing in the devil are not less gullible. Indeed, we see people, sometimes highly educated and otherwise rational people, believing in some pretty wild and hokey things. The inexplicable rise of Scientology, Christian Science, Anthroposophism, National Socialism, and various other religious, political, and supposedly post-religious movements have all taken place after the enlightenment. To be sure, folks before the

enlightenment burned a few witches and perhaps for the simple reason that they weighed as much as a duck.

This sermon really wants the hearer to be comforted and confident when this is all done, not afraid of Satan, but glad that Jesus is going to bat for them, thus the preacher needs to be careful here, it could easily slip into a sermon about being afraid and losing sight of the main point. But the preacher also wants to make his hearer aware of the fact that there is a reality to the spiritual enemies who prowl about like roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour. We fail to preach the whole counsel of God if we are silent on this because it is not comfortable for a “scientific” world. But preach it so Jesus, the great champion who has conquered all our foes, brings peace and joy to your people.

3. “I want to go with you” (Galatians and Gospel - That the hearer, comforted by Christ and empowered by the Spirit, would joyfully and eagerly seek to serve Christ as God’s beloved child, eager to please him and hear his praise.)

Jesus often is doing a miracle and then saying “go and tell...” In John 4, he sent the woman at the well to the Samaritan village, she was the last person you would have expected to be an evangelist to that community. Likewise this fellow is probably not your first choice. Peter’s restoration also came to mind, “do you love me?...feed my sheep” Of course Paul is another great example of this. God has a tendency to use some pretty unlikely people, even enemies, to be his emissaries. How often don’t we make them take a new member class before we will even let them come, let alone go and speak on our behalf.

This sermon really picks up on the response of the healed demoniac and the words of the Epistle lesson for this day. We thought that the sermon might just tell the story of Jesus arrival at the scene of the Gerasenes through the eyes of the demoniac. We might start by simply describing what this would be like for the demoniac. He always got his way, he was uncontrollable. But then one day a presence showed up, got off the boat, before whom he could not stand. In the world of demons, more powerful beings always mean more pain for me. Could we speak of his fear, but then his sense of freedom? His demoniac dominated world could not imagine that Jesus had come to love him, but could only see this through that lens of power and domination. Here came his enemy, and his enemy set him free. We live in a world in which there is no such thing as a free lunch, we are always buying something. The demoniac was always trying to curry favor or avoid some punishment. Jesus was not for sale and he was not here to punish, even the demons. He was here to set the man free.

After you do this, you might just then turn to Paul and listen to him explain/describe this freedom.

Alternately, The preacher might just want to play on some of the Father’s Day material. Why does the little boy want to dress just like his dad? Paul speaks of us as sons who are

toiling away at the side of the servants, but because we are heirs of all, we work for a totally different motivation, really the motive of the poor demoniac after he was sent forth to tell the good news.

The law in this sort of a sermon is really the idea that we are serving God out of some sort of obligation, debt, contract, etc., or out of some hope of a reward or payment. It is a demonic lie, a deception all the more potent because it has at its heart a germ of truth. As if our job now that Jesus has died is to glorify God, and we had better get it right. All of this is true. Even for creation it is our duty to thank and praise, serve and obey him. But the second article of the creed introduces that marvelous little “may” which demands our attention. After Jesus has rescued us from sin, death, and devil, Luther says we “may” serve him in everlasting righteousness, blessedness, and innocence. We are not obligated, but we do just as much, even more than the Law required of us as God’s duly created beings.

The Gospel of this text is really sweet to preach and it is so contrary to our experience, it never really grows stale. Our lives are no longer on the measure of whether it is good enough. Jesus has made it all good enough. Now it is simply what it is, a life lived in response to Jesus. We are telling the good news of what God has done for us, not because we are forced to or that we earn some points with God, but just because he did it, and we are pretty excited about that. The demoniac’s witness is empowered by the freedom he has enjoyed.

We struggle to speak of this. It is not a cause and effect or manipulated response like we are used to seeing. Our world just doesn’t get this sort of motive, at least not that well. This is the difference between law and gospel motivation. The Gospel motive is something that wells up inside a person. It is simply the description of who we are. The preacher will want to tie this to the passionate worship of the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. We have to be careful here, “hurry and feel this!” is not a gospel message. This is a message which declares us to be something, we either believe the declaration or we don’t. We cannot make that happen.

In this sort of a sermon you may want to bring up the dramatic instance. God has inspired people to do amazing things. Francis of Assisi, Mother Theresa, and others come to mind, but perhaps you want to find a newer sort of guy. You might look to some heroic deed in the news, a life of service given to the community, a recently departed saint within your own parish. Why did this person go to such lengths? Surely it was not that God would love him more, but because of God’s great love for him, he was inspired and moved to do great things in service to the people whom God loves.

This sermon is very doctrinal. It wants to locate the service of the human being in the proper context, but that is not the ultimate goal of this sermon. It seeks to tap into the passionate worship of the woman in last week’s lesson as well and channel that passion into the beautiful service rendered to God wholly and beautifully. We can understand this

very well and be terribly right and terribly cold about the whole thing. This sermon if it succeeds is really seeking to empower and fill people with passion for Christ.

If you want to read the Lutheran Confessions about this, pick up the Formula of Concord, Article IV in which it speaks of the regenerate Christian serving with a “free and merry spirit.” At least that is how Kolb and Wengert translated it and I think they did so rather well.

The folks who dig in the ancient city near the Gerasenes report that this was a very Christian place, eight churches in a rather small place in the centuries which followed the exorcism of these many demons. Apparently through the willing witness of this man, God continued to exorcise a few demons and it became a very Christian place.