

Pentecost 2 / June 19, 2022

Luke 8:26-39

“Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.”

Declare how much God has done for you!

How much has God done for you? When we are feeling sad, sorrowful and frustrated, it is easy to focus on what we think God has not done for us. But whatever we may feel God has not done for us, it is important to consider what God has done for us. What has God done for us? He has given us life. The psalmist sang, “You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb...in your book were written, every one of the days that were formed for me.” In his explanation of the first article of the Apostles’ Creed, Martin Luther wrote: “He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my senses, and still takes care of them.” He gives us every physical possession, for as the psalmist said, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness of it.” He gives us our talents and abilities. He gives us our families and friends. Every good gift of life, including the gift of life itself, are blessings from God’s loving hand.

But is that all God has done for us? God has done much more for us and for every human soul. He has given His Son into the world, sharing our humanity, suffering death on the cross to redeem us from our sins, lift from our heads the condemnation of eternal death and set us free from the power of sin and control of the devil. In Jesus, God speaks words of forgiveness, healing and life. He calls us to Himself, saying, “Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.” God calls us to Himself through His word. He gives us faith to believe and opens our hearts to receive Jesus as our Saviour, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. Jesus rescues us from the control of Satan, even as He did for the man in our gospel, possessed by many evil spirits. What has God done for us? He has brought us into the kingdom of His Son through faith, given us adoption as His children. And that’s not all! One day He will bring us fully in His kingdom in our share of Jesus’ resurrection.

The gospel this morning is an encounter between Jesus and a man possessed by so many evil spirits that they call themselves ‘legion.’ When we hear the word legion, we might think of a place where old soldiers go to drink beer and tell war stories. But in the ancient world a legion was not a place to drink and reminisce. A legion was a military term for an army, a Roman army to be specific. A Roman legion was an army made up of between three thousand and six thousand soldiers. It was a large army. Beyond the sheer strength of numbers, a Roman legion was composed of skilled, trained and seasoned warriors. Its soldiers were armed with catapults, battering rams and every tool necessary to bring an opponent to its knees and keep them there. A Roman legion occupied Galilee and Judea at the time of Jesus. The Jewish people resisted, but the Romans were too numerous and too powerful for them to overcome. The Roman possession of Galilee and Judea was symbolic of the devil’s possession and power over the human spirit, illustrated by the poor man in our gospel.

The man Jesus encountered in our text was possessed by so many powerful evil spirits that they identified themselves as “Legion.” Their power was evident in his ability to break chains and resist human restraint. Their power over him was evident in his inability to resist or repel them. The man was in misery. He lived outside the human community. He was without God and without hope in the world. This man in his misery was the embodiment of the human spiritual condition, in which by nature, we are in bondage to sin, under the control of the devil and under the condemnation of death, without God and without hope.

Paul described our natural spiritual condition in the letter to the Ephesians saying, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” In this man, tormented by a legion of devils, we see our need for Christ to be our Saviour. We cannot free ourselves! In Jesus’ kindness, casting the evil spirits from him, we see the same mercy we receive from God for the sake of Jesus. What has God done for us? He has been merciful to us for the sake of Christ Jesus, set us free from the power of sin and the devil. Again, in the letter to the Ephesians Paul wrote, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us...made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved.” Jesus sets us free from the control of Satan that we may live as children in the kingdom of His heavenly Father, now through faith, one day in His resurrection to life everlasting.

The evil spirits had one thing on humans, in that they recognized Jesus' divinity, hidden beneath the cloak of His humanity. They see, but as St. James said, 'they tremble.' Despite their power and number, they are no match for Jesus. They recognize Jesus' supreme power as the eternal Son of God. They cry out in fear saying, "I beg you, do not torment me." Seeing the Son of God, they also see their sinfulness. This is the source of their greatest fear! It's not just evil spirits, everyone senses their sin when they find themselves in the presence of God. Adam and Eve's first response to God's presence after they sinned was to cover themselves and hide. No matter how we see ourselves, as good, bad or somewhere in the middle, when people find themselves in the presence of God, we sense our sin. Our first reaction is fear and a desire for the Lord to go away.

Once after He finished preaching, Jesus told Peter where to cast his nets for a catch of fish. Peter was skeptical. Jesus was a carpenter by trade and a preacher by profession. What did He know about fishing? Peter saw things differently when he hauled in so many fish the nets were bursting. He recognized Jesus' divinity. Immediately he saw his own sin and cried out, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man. But Jesus didn't go away from Peter. He forgave him and called him to Himself. Human beings have this on evil spirits, Jesus wants to forgive us and heal us. Jesus doesn't go away. He doesn't send us away when we come to Him with our sins. He calls us to Himself that He might bind up our wounds and heal us with forgiveness.

Jesus didn't send the man in our text away. He didn't abandon him to his demons. Instead, He set him free from the spirits that enthralled him. He restored him to his right mind. He sent him back to be a member of the community from which he had been driven out. He told him to declare how much God had done for him. He told him to tell what God has done for all of us, in giving Him to be our Saviour. Jesus came to set the prisoners free from captivity to sin. He came to proclaim release to those held captive by the devil. That's all of us and every human being. The greatest imprisonment and captivity is the bondage of the human spirit to sin, the devil and death. All of us were imprisoned to sin. All of us were under the condemnation of death. But in Christ, God has set us free. All of us still have things that bind us, torment us and make us fearful. But through His life, His death and His resurrection, into which we have been baptized, Jesus sets us free from the fear of condemnation. He comforts our troubled spirits through the Holy Spirit, whom He gives to dwell within our spirits. He brings peace to our relationships with others. He gives us peace in our relationship with his Father in heaven. He truly restores us to community, by making us sisters and brothers, children of the Heavenly Father.

We only find true and lasting peace in relationship with God. Jesus established this relationship of peace through the blood of His cross, by which He took away the sin of the world, from which sin, the devil and death draw their power. He establishes us in this relationship through our baptism into His death and resurrection. In the promise of our baptism, He forgives our sins, casts the evil spirit from us and renews us with the Holy Spirit. In all our troubles, struggles and sorrows, Jesus calls us to Himself that we may receive His peace. He will not turn us away. When we turn away, He calls us back. He promises never to leave or forsake us. He will not take His Holy Spirit from us. He will encourage, strengthen and sustain us in grace, until we come to the perfect and eternal peace of life everlasting, where sin, the devil and death are no more. What has God done for us? He has given us forgiveness, freedom, peace and the promise of eternal life for the sake of Jesus. In His Name. Amen