

“The Defeat of the Demons”

Date: June 23, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: 1 Kings 19:1-15a; Luke 8:26-39

Occasion: Pentecost 2, Year C

Themes: Demons, Healing, Powers

We live in a culture that is filled with demons, perhaps even more so than when Jesus walked on earth. “Uh-oh,” some of you may be thinking. “The preacher has gone off the deep end now.”

Well, before you jump to the conclusion that I’m a little loony, which may or may not be true, let me explain how I understand demons in the world today. Maybe then, you too will come to the same conclusion I have, that we live in a culture filled with demons. If this passage is to speak to us today, we need to believe Jesus can set **us** free from the demons which possess us.

I believe that Luke, the author of our text this morning, had in mind a spiritual contest or battle between good and evil. When Jesus cast out demons, there was more going on than meets the eye.

There was a battle taking place, a battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. It was not merely a physical problem which afflicted this man in our lesson today; it was a spiritual problem as well. Whenever Jesus healed, he was at war with Satan.

Whenever Jesus encountered evil, he was opposed to it. When he saw hungry people, he fed them. When he came upon demons, he cast them out. When he encountered sin, he forgave. When he faced death – on the cross – he overcame it. The victory belongs to Jesus! Amen?

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ can be understood as the triumph of love, as the power of good to overcome evil, and as the victory

of God over sin. So, when Jesus cast out demons, he was demonstrating the power of God to bring life and goodness and healing into people's lives.

That power, the power of God, is still at work in the world today, working to bring life and healing and goodness into the world. *This* is how I understand the triumph of God over the demons of the world. With the advent of science, many of the unexplainable things of the ancient world, which used to be attributed to unseen demons, could now be explained.

For example, many diseases are now treated with medicine, used to be attributed to demons. Praise God for the victory. Praise God for the knowledge God has given to the human race to overcome illness. Another example, when a person has epilepsy, he or she is not possessed by unseen demons, but rather needs medication to control their seizures.

If a person has a mental illness, she or he is often affected by a chemical imbalance in their brain which can be treated with medicine. Praise God! The modern Christian does not have to choose between faith and science, as though the two are opposed to each other.

Modern medicine, I believe, is a gift God has given to humanity. Scientists and doctors have learned how to work with God in treating illnesses. We have learned, with God's help, the laws of biology and chemistry and physics, and we have learned how to work with those laws.

God gave human beings a mind and God wants us to use our minds – for the good of humanity. It is God who created the world with all of its amazing physical laws, and it is God who imparts the wisdom. Let us be humble enough to recognize who is the Creator and who is the creature, lest we become so arrogant as to think we have replaced God.

It is God who inspires us to learn, and God who gives us the curiosity to want to know how things work. It is God who gives us the insight to know

how to treat sickness. And it is God who challenges us to use our human wisdom to help others. Yes, thank your doctor for the medical care you receive; but give God the praise for your healing. Doctors only assist the Almighty; they are not the Almighty.

So, sickness, we might say, is a demon. It causes untold human suffering. Jesus was opposed to sickness and suffering, and he healed as a sign of God's love for people. When doctors and other members of the medical team treat illnesses today, they are demonstrating the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. They cast out demons, if you will, making sick people well.

But there is another way we can understand the term "demon" in our world today. That is to use it as a metaphor to describe those evil forces that control us, and over which we seem to have little power. There are powers and forces of evil at work in our world today which threaten both individuals and society as a whole. Let me name some of those demons:

Drug addiction and alcoholism are demons. Addicts frequently speak about their demons, how they feel possessed, causing them to do things they don't want to do. Whether its street drugs, or prescribed medication, or just beer and wine – these substances have the potential to overwhelm an individual. It's taking a toll on our society as well. Substance abuse is demonic.

Pornography can be demonic – causing people to become addicted and ruining marriages. Human trafficking is a demonic force in our world, and much of the pornography on the Internet involves individuals forced to do things against their will.

The list of societal ills that could be labeled demonic grows and grows: child abuse, poverty, racism, violence and on and on.

Lest we sit in the pew, smugly, and think that only other people have demons, let us have the courage to look in the mirror and name the demons in our own lives. Demons are those forces which seek to draw us away from God and over which we seem to have no control. We want to stop; we want to change; we want to be different; but we don't seem to have the power to change.

Some are addicted to smoking cigarettes and want to stop, but can't. There are those who are compulsive eaters, who feed their emotions instead of their stomachs. Many people are addicted to negative thinking, self-pity and feeling sorry for themselves. They know in their minds that it's not healthy to think like that, but they can't turn the thoughts off.

Greed is a demon – making us think that things are more important than people, that possessions are more important than God. The list goes on. We live in a world that is filled with demons, even though they may not look like the little gremlins of our imagination.

But there is hope. There is one who had defeated the demons; His name is Jesus. Jesus Christ breaks the chains that bind us and He sets the prisoner free. While on earth he cast out demons. On the cross he broke the power of sin and death. In resurrection he lives forever to reign in glory. And He gives us the Holy Spirit that we might be free.

Satan is allowed for a time to do his dirty work. But the victory belongs to our Lord. Daily, every single day, Jesus is setting people free from their demons. The alcoholic proclaims the miracle - of beer being turned into furniture - as he gave up the bottle and became a family man.

The drug addict is being set free from the torture chamber of drug abuse. The rage-aholic who yells and berates his wife is getting help and learning to control his anger. And the depressed woman who was

consumed with self-pity is empowered to become a confident, new person.

How is it happening? Well, first the person admits they need help. They need to realize that their current way of life isn't working, and they need to ask for help. Those who find freedom come to realize there is a force greater than themselves, and they ask for help. They find it in Jesus.

Sometimes Jesus wears the face of friend who is willing to listen. Sometimes Jesus is found in a support group. Sometimes Jesus is found in the church. And many times people find Jesus outside the church, out there where sinners and people are struggling.

What are your demons? From what are you struggling to be set free? I invite you to face your demon, give it a name, and ask for help. Find a group, call a friend, speak to your pastor, call your doctor. There is hope.

Jesus Christ gives us all new life, new hope and new beginnings. Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened; ask and you shall receive. Jesus Christ is the one who can defeat the demons. Amen!