

# Sermon for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Pentecost

**Text: Luke 8:26-39**

As Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a man from the town who had demons in him. For a long time this man had gone without clothes and would not stay at home, but spent his time in the burial caves. When he saw Jesus, he gave a loud cry, threw himself down at his feet, and shouted, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? I beg you, don't punish me!" He said this because Jesus had ordered the evil spirit to go out of him (verses 27-29a).



"MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE."

## Is Satan Real?

Two 6 year olds struggled with the problem of the existence of the devil.

One boy said, "Oh, there isn't any devil."

The other, rather upset, said, "What do you mean, there isn't any devil? It talks about him all the way through the Bible!"

The first replied, "Oh that's not true, you know. It's just like Santa Claus, it's only dad."

How do you picture Satan? When you think of the devil, do you think of him with horns, a goatee beard, a devilish grin, a pointed tail and a pitchfork? I think that the devil would be

quite happy being portrayed like this. He would be easy to pick out in a crowd and so easy to avoid. There would be no chance of the devil sneaking up and catching us unprepared. We would be able to see him coming a mile away.

The Bible doesn't picture Satan as being like this at all? Someone once wrote, "If I were an artist illustrating the story of Jesus being tempted by the devil, I would draw Satan as a very pleasant-looking person ... so nice that it would be difficult to tell which was Satan and which was Jesus in the picture". This person is saying that the devil comes in disguise. When he tempts, he does it in such a way that you don't even know you're being tempted.

But hey, wait a minute! We are living in the 21st century. All this talk about the devil and demons was all right for the people back then in Jesus time and even people in 15th & 16th centuries, but we have come along way since those times. We joke about the devil, but we don't take him seriously. Besides what was once called demon-possession in Jesus' time can be explained by modern medicine. We know that epilepsy was thought to be a form of demon possession and many other sicknesses as the result of sin and the influence of Satan.

Probably the most famous depiction of demon possession is the movie *The Exorcist*. It is based on an actual case based in St. Louis, but the amazing part is the amount of effort required to beat the devil. He is powerful. Satan is a cunning enemy. He is not some cute cartoon figure, but he real and dangerous. The Bible urges us to take him seriously.

Jesus takes Satan seriously. In fact, he sees his whole ministry as a conflict with Satan. He teaches about the power of Satan. He saw his death as the supreme battle with

the evil one. Jesus isn't just a child of his age and is repeating what he had learnt from others. He speaks definitely and personally about the power of Satan and continually warns others about this power. If Jesus takes him seriously then I think we should also.

Today's Gospel reading tells us of one of the occasions when Jesus confronted Satan. It was a very scary situation. Jesus and the disciples had just sailed across Lake Galilee and had put ashore, when suddenly a naked wild man came rushing toward them screaming and yelling. He lived like an animal in the nearby burial caves in the cemetery. We are told demons had taken over his life. He became uncontrollable and dangerous. The townspeople tackled the man and chained his arms and feet, but the wild man had super human strength and snapped the chains. He cried out in loud, often inhuman voices, cutting himself with stones as he gave out wild screams.

It seems the townspeople and the wild man had come to some sort of understanding. The wild man would live outside of the town in the burial caves, so when the man was tormented by demons and he became wild and uncontrollable he would not harm anyone else. Everyone knew that the place where Jesus had landed was, by common consent, a no-man's land.

As the wild man rushed downhill from the tombs, eyes crazed, screaming at the top of his lungs, it must have been a frightening sight for the disciples. Perhaps they considered jumping back into the boat or jumping on the man as a group, hoping their combined strength would contain him. The demons recognised Jesus. They were afraid; they knew that Jesus' had the power to send them back to where they came from. Jesus demonstrates his power by simply asking,

"What is your name?" The demons were in control of the wild man but Jesus was in control of them. He commands them to come out of the man and enter a nearby herd of pigs.

When the local people from the town come out to see what was going on they were shocked at what they saw. This once wild man was "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind" (Luke 5:35).

There is much that can be said about this text, but there is one clear message - even though Satan is powerful; the power of Jesus is even stronger. In fact, Luke has placed this event in amongst other demonstrations of Jesus' power. Immediately before this story, we find Jesus commanding the wind and waves to be quiet. Jesus need only speak the word and a great calm fell on the lake (Luke 8:22-25). Jesus was more powerful than the destructive forces of nature.

Then immediately after the expulsion of Satan from the wild man, Luke tells us that Jesus has the power to heal. He restores to health a woman who had been ill for 12 years. She had examined by an untold number of doctors but they were unable to heal her; but Jesus did. He did what had been humanly impossible. He has the power to control disease, viruses, bacteria, bleeding, epilepsy, leprosy, and cancer. He has the power to heal the incurable.

In fact, he has the power to raise the dead. He went to the home of a twelve-year-old girl who had died. No one could do anything for her now except to mourn the passing of this young life. They had been powerless in the face of death. They could not stop it taking this girl's life. They even made fun of Jesus when he said she was only sleeping. Dead was dead, as far they were concerned. They underestimated the power of Jesus. He took the child by the hand and to

everyone's amazement, he brought her back to life. Jesus could even command the dead to rise. He was more powerful than death itself.

I'm especially glad that Jesus has all power and authority when it comes to Satan. I'm especially glad simply because Satan is far more powerful than we are.

Satan blinds us. St Paul says, "The god of this age (the devil) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 2:4 NIV). We might have heard the same message from the Bible over and over, but Satan blinds us to what God is trying to say to us. We close our ears; we interpret what is said in our own way, we refuse to apply what God is saying to our own lives.

Satan wants to control us:

1. to possess us,
2. to tempt us to do what is against God's plan for our lives,
3. to lead us astray by telling us that wrong is right, that the truth is a lie, that God does not love us,
4. to influence us,
5. to hinder us from doing what we know God wants us to do.

Satan loves bitterness, hatred, violence, arguments; he loves dividing people and especially dividing families and the church.

He can enter the hearts of people and cause so much harm. Drunkenness, drug abuse, greed, road rage, vulgar language, racial prejudice, abusiveness, despair, sexual promiscuity; I'm sure you get the picture.

The power of Satan is nothing to mess around with. Séances, ouija boards, witchcraft, the occult, are dangerous. Using these is an invitation to Satan to take control.

Having said all this you might be beginning to wonder whether we have any chance against such a formidable foe. We all know how easy it is for us to succumb to his temptations. When we think everything is going okay, bingo we suddenly realize that Satan has been leading us along by the nose. Sometimes we aren't even aware that he is having such a powerful influence in our lives. So how can we stand up against something so powerful?

The answer is simple – we can't! Not by ourselves anyway. That's not to say that we shouldn't try to resist Satan and his temptations and not give in to his attempts to lead us astray. James says, "So then, submit yourselves to God. Resist the Devil, and he will run away from you" (4:7). We need a power that is far greater than any power we have in ourselves. We need the power of Christ on our side if we are going to resist the devil.

Satan wants to draw us away from God's kingdom into his own dark realm. Daily he tempts us; he tries to draw us away from God. He tempts us so that we fall under God's condemnation and be sent to hell.

But Jesus has broken Satan's power. Remember I said before that the whole life of Jesus is an attack against the domination of the devil and the climax of the battle occurred

on the cross of Calvary. On the cross, Jesus broke the stranglehold that Satan can have over.

He has won for us forgiveness for all the times we give into Satan.

He has redeemed us – that means he has bought us back from sin and Satan with the price of his own blood.

He has reclaimed us as his own and made us his dear children.

He has made us new, given us a fresh start, and given us his Holy Spirit to help us resist Satan's power.

Satan may tempt us and we will give in, we deserve God's punishment, but through his death and resurrection, through the water of baptism we belong to God; we are forgiven and free. We are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps and likewise resist the devil. Paul says, "Let the mighty strength of the Lord make you strong. Put on all the armour God gives, so you can defend yourself against the devil's tricks. ... And when the battle is over, you will still be standing firm (worth reading all of Ephesians 6:10-17).

Our story from Luke's Gospel concluded, "The man went through the town, telling what Jesus had done for him" (Luke 8:39). Just as Jesus commissioned the once wild man to "Go back home and tell what God has done for you", he has also commanded us to share the good news of freedom from Satan's power to anyone who would listen. Jesus wants every person in this nation, in the whole world to say with Paul, "God rescued us from the dark power of Satan and brought us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col 1:13).