

Luke 8:26-39 - “Reaching Out to Sinners”

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In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus reached out to the most unclean of the unclean; a man who was possessed by unclean spirits and who lived naked among unclean tombs, and Jesus cleansed him! Jesus delivers this demon possessed man from his demons. In the light of this Good News, our theme for today’s sermon is “Reaching Out to Sinners.”

Even though we may have never been possessed by a demon, let alone many demons like the man in our text, we were all born with a sinful nature which is just as evil as demons and makes us just as unclean. If left to itself, and fed with the rapidly growing evil in the world around us, our sinful nature would grow more and more perverse, adding to this world’s rapid decline.

Thank the Lord that He has come to us through people like our parents and pastor’s to cleanse us from our sins by drowning our sinful nature in the waters of Holy Baptism, like the demons Jesus sent into a herd of pigs which were drown in the depths of the sea of Galilee. This power of the Lord, through His Word and the waters of Holy Baptism, is now at work in us and through us to not only help put a damper on the evil in this world, but to also deliver others from the hold which their sinful nature has on them—to turn others from sinners to saints in the Lord.

While every congregation I’ve been privileged to serve as a pastor over the past 35+ years has been full of sinners like myself and yourselves, this is the first congregation where I’ve ministered to members with the last name of Sinner. Even though it would probably be confusing if we all had the last name Sinner, it would be a helpful reminder not only of the sinful nature we’re all born with, but also of our need for a Savior. Then, at our Baptism, we could all be given an individual Christian first name, like Kurt, and perhaps the middle name Saint, to remind us of what Jesus makes us through His death on a cross in payment of our sins and His resurrection from the dead to give us faith in this Good News. Our names would then be Kurt Saint Sinner, or LeeAnn Saint Sinner, or Bill Saint Sinner (which is no B.S.).

I say that because in this world, which in a growing number of areas has set aside this month of June as Pride Month in order to promote the LGBTQ+ agenda, it’s important that we as both saints and sinners reach out to fellow sinners (no matter what their sin) with the same outstretched arms of Jesus. We reach out not to embrace or encourage the sinful nature in others, but to give them the loving words of God our Savior, whose love is made clear through sacrifice instead of separation.

Instead of wanting nothing to do with the unclean, naked, demon possessed man in our text, Jesus demonstrates His love and concern for this man by first carrying on a conversation with him. This obviously resulted in scorn by some and confusion by others, which Jesus would deal with later, but first He was concerned about this demon possessed man. By carrying on a conversation with him, Jesus was not only conversing with the demons in this man, but also with the poor sinner who was possessed by those demons and, therefore, unable to even cry out for help.

The demons, however, did cry out, expressing their apparent fear of the Lord’s judgement against them by begging Jesus not to send them into the abyss of hell where they will live in eternal torment. But Jesus knows better. Jesus knows that lying is a demon’s native language, for there is no truth in them (John 8:44). They know what God’s Word says about hell, but they don’t believe it. So don’t feel sorry for demons. The main reason they want to remain in this world is not so that they can

avoid hell, but so that they can do all in their power to separate us and keep us separated from God's Word. For it's through God's Word that the Holy Spirit works to create, sustain and strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Jesus didn't fall for the demon's lies. Instead He sent them into a herd of pigs, "*and the herd rushed down the steep bank and into the lake [the Sea of Galilee] and were drowned.*" Through this, Jesus gives us a clear pre-view of His ability to free us from our sins, death and the devil. We see this most clearly through Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross to cleanse us from our sins, and His all-powerful resurrection from the dead in victory over our sins, death and the devil.

No wonder the man in our text wanted to remain with Jesus once he was free of the demons. Jesus has the power to keep us free. Hopefully that's also why we're here today, because we want to be where Jesus promises to be through His Word and the Lord's Supper to frees us from our demons and keep us free.

The man in our text had yet to learn this truth from God's Word about the Lord's presence with us always, through His Word and Sacraments, to create, sustain and strengthen our repentance and faith in His love and forgiveness so that we would not live the rest of our lives in this world in fear, like most of the people in our text and many in our world today. Instead, through His gift of faith, the Lord enables us to live in the confident faith that God has Satan on a leash, and is working even through the evil of demons and those who are blinded by them—through all the troubles of this fallen world—for the good of those who will eventually believe and be saved.

To demonstrate our faith in this Good News the Lord sends us out into this fallen world like He sent out the man in our text. He sends us into a world full of people who are blinded and controlled by their sinful nature, "*to declare how much God has done*" for us and them—for all people. But how do you get close enough to people who are like hostile, mad dogs, to tell them God's Word of truth about our sins and our Savior, Jesus Christ?

Let me illustrate one effective way of "Reaching Out to Sinners," which we learn from Jesus in our text. [Children's Sermon.] Suppose your neighbor had a mad dog. It was on a leash, but was always wildly barking, showing his teeth, and sometimes breaking free from his leash. Would you go up to him and try to pet him? No, of course not. If you did, he would probably bite you.

So what could you do to try and make friends with this dog? You might toss him a treat, like this one. Maybe, after a while of doing this (and it could be a long while), that mad dog may let you close enough to pet it.

People can sometimes be like that mad dog, or like the demon possessed man in our Gospel reading. What they often don't realize is that God loves them, which is why Jesus was willing to die on the cross to take the punishment for the sins of all people upon Himself. He loves us all. So, doing nice things to or for others is a good way to begin to show them God's love. Even little things can help. Then maybe later you will be able to share with them the biggest thing of all, the Good News of what Jesus has done for all people on the cross.

To be able to share the Good News of God's love with others there are two important things to remember: 1st - Invest in God's Word (main message = the **†**).
2nd - Invest in human relationships by being kind to others, no matter who they are.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.