

4th Sunday after Pentecost C (6/20/10 – *Christ Sets Us Free*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

We have quite a scene set before us in the *Holy Gospel* for today [LK 8.26-39] – quite a scene indeed. The bulletin graphic captures the Scriptural picture rather nicely. An unclothed man stands before Jesus in seemingly great agitation – the chainless bands of broken shackles still on his wrists and ankles. We see the man fall down before Jesus in our text ... can almost hear him cry out in a loud – crazed – voice: ***What have You to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.*** [8.28] We find out that there are a great many demons who have made this man their home – their name is ***Legion*** [8.30]. Then we hear their plea that Jesus not send them into the abyss ... of hell. They will be there ... for eternity – with no escape. But for now they wish to be permitted to roam the spiritual realm ... and to do battle with the angels of God and the children of men.

By His Word alone, the Incarnate God casts out of the man the dark demons that had possessed him. But to our surprise, the Lord grants their wish. And that should teach us something. Namely, this: If God shows even momentary compassion to hardened demons who will never repent of their rebellion against God and cannot be redeemed – then surely He also will show mercy to us ... bring us to repentance ... and restore us to the heavenly Father ... since Christ has redeemed us with His Blood.

What happens next in our text is more surprising still. The Lord permits the demons – at their request – to enter into a herd of pigs. Now this is no small herd, mind you. We are not talking about just one or two dozen swine. St. Mark tells us there were about two thousand in that herd [MK 5.13]. Then this whole herd of about two thousand pigs goes running – pell-mell – into the Sea of Galilee ... and drowns. Curiously, the only other occurrence of this word translated here as “drown” is in Jesus’ *Parable of the Sower* – which Luke has recorded earlier in the same chapter of our *Gospel* [8.4-8]. In that parable, Jesus talks about the seed that falls among the thorns being

choked out by the thorns [LK 8.7; MT 13.7]. Our Lord goes on to explain that this represents *those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature* [LK 8.14]. In other words, their faith is choked out ... drowned.

We can easily understand the man's demon-possessed insanity. Why is it, then, we are unable to see that we ourselves – all too often – are also not in our right mind? We are like that shackled demoniac. We become shackled with our sin. We are besieged at times by satan, because we have given up the fight against the temptations he brings and the sins that rage like madmen – demons – within our flesh. We let ourselves become unclothed; and we sit in the filthy, dark, and dank tombs of our sin ... that would lead us to death. We sometimes behave like those demon-possessed pigs. We run and thrash about in life ... going along with the great herd of the unclean. Left on our own, we would go crashing headlong into eternal death.

In the fourth stanza of the hymn *Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice*, Luther poetically applies the Gerasene demoniac's situation to himself ... **and to us:**

Fast bound in satan's chains I lay; Death brooded darkly o'er me.

Sin was my torment night and day; In sin my mother bore me.

But daily deeper still I fell; My life became a living hell.

So firmly sin possessed me. [LSB 556.2]

That is, indeed, our natural, sin-born state. By natural birth, we are not in our right minds. On the one hand, we strive against God and His good. On the other hand, we naturally embrace that which is evil and demonic. That is how firmly our sinful state possesses us. Our sinful wrong-headedness is so great that left to ourselves we think the darkness, death, and stench of the tombs is our home ... and that is where we would dwell.

But our Lord Jesus Christ has **not** left us to ourselves ... in our sin-induced wrong-mindedness. He comes to us where we are. (Remember, it

is Jesus Who crosses the Sea of Galilee to come to where this man is.) Jesus comes to us out of love and compassion. He comes to us to cast off the shackles of our sin and decay and death. Christ comes to us ... and *Christ Sets Us Free* from all the evil that would possess us and drag us not only to the tomb of our death ... but also into the eternal death of the abyss.

Jesus, the Son of the Most High God [8.28] comes to us from on high and shackles Himself with the weakness of our mortal flesh. Jesus comes to us and dwells in the darkness of our corrupt world ... breathing the stench of **our** deadly sin. Jesus comes to us and willingly binds to Himself **our** sin – bearing it and taking it away to the Cross. Jesus comes to us and makes our punishment His Own. Obediently the Son receives upon Himself and in His very real flesh the righteous wrath of the Father against **our** sins – and is covered with the darkness of death. Jesus comes to us and makes **our** tomb His own – lying in the dark grave three days ... making it His dwelling place.

But then the third day *the Son of the Most High God* rises from that filthy, dark, and dank tomb. He has burst the chains of satan, death, and the grave – they could not hold the Author of Life. By His death Jesus has drowned death – choked it and swallowed it up by His holy, righteous Life.

Christ Sets Us Free. He comes and looses satan's chains that bind us mind and soul. In the waters of Holy Baptism He has drowned in you all the wrong-minded sinful flesh. At Christ's command, the unclean spirit has departed ... and made room for the Holy Spirit. All your squalor has been cast into the depths of the sea. You are no longer naked in our sin. You are no longer bound. You have been clothed in the holiness and righteousness of Christ. You are in your right mind – for you have been given the mind of Christ [1COR 2.16].

And every time we re-bind the shackles of sin and death to ourselves, Christ comes to us ... and *Christ Sets Us Free* ... all over again. He doesn't have to take our sin upon Himself again ... or receive God's wrath again ... or lie in the grave of death again. For His work of salvation is finished ...

once-and-for-all. What your Savior does, is come to you repeatedly ... continually ... to renew you in your Baptism – that connects you to His death and resurrection. Christ comes to you and restores your mind – by the power of His Word. Christ comes to you today – in Word and Sacrament – and once again *Christ Sets Us Free* from all that would bind you to sin and death. Your sins are forgiven – Christ has absolved you. The evil one has no power over you – you belong to Christ. Since you are united to Christ in a death like His ... you will also be united to Him in a resurrection like His [ROM 6.5].

The devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh would try to distract you from these realities ... rob you of your true freedom in Christ ... and return you to the insanity of sin and unbelief. But the Word of *Christ Sets Us Free* ... and keeps you in a right mind ... clothes you anew in the garment of your Savior. Here ... today ... in this place, you are *sitting at the feet of Jesus* [8.35]. That is what the *Divine Service* is all about – Christ coming to you where you are in your life (or the death of your sin) to restore you in His forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And like the case of the right-minded man healed of his demons, Jesus sends you out into the world, saying: *Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you* [8.39]. Soon enough you will be able to sit at Jesus' feet forever – in heaven. For now, the insane world needs to hear about Christ ... and what He has done for them – even if, in their upside-down thinking, you seem to be the one out of your mind. Fathers – mothers and children too ... but especially you fathers – when you go out from this place today, remember to tell your family and friends and neighbors throughout the week about the One Who comes to us and casts out our uncleanness ... Who has forgiven all our sins ... Who has laid in our grave ... Who has given us His resurrection and life. Then return here to sit once again at Jesus' feet ... since *Christ Sets Us Free*.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]