

Luke 4:31-37 (Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany—Series C)
“Jesus’ Word of Authority and Power over the Devil”
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT
January 30, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is from the Gospel reading for the day recorded in Luke 4:

³¹And [Jesus] went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And He was teaching them on the Sabbath. ³²And they were amazed at His teaching because His word had authority. ³³Now in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴“Ah! What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know you—who you are—the Holy One of God!” ³⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Silence! Come out of him!” And after the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. ³⁶Now amazement came upon everyone and they began to say to one another, “What is this word, that with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out?” ³⁷And the report concerning Him went out to every place in the region.

“Heads spinning, Latin flowing from the tongue, elevation, violent shaking, the strength of 10 men, visions: These are among the so-called signs of demonic possession according to Hollywood movies. In these frightful depictions, the emphasis is placed upon the work of the devil—what *he* does and how *he* does it. But we often forget about the demon-possessed person: his fear, helplessness and suffering.

In 2009, LCMS World Relief and Human Care sponsored a Mercy Mission Expedition to Madagascar. Along with Prof. John Pless and several other seminary students, [Geoff Boyle] was invited to witness firsthand how exorcism—something [he] knew little about—is a part of the Malagasy Lutheran Church’s regular expression of Christ’s mercy.

While in Madagascar, [they] learned that demon possession is usually the result of satanic cults or practices, which are quite common among the traditional tribal religions. To encounter demon-possession in Madagascar isn’t nearly as rare as in America. That’s why exorcism functions as part of the regular ministry of the church there. Casting out demons is

simply the natural response of Christianity in a pagan context. The Gospel cannot but help to cast out the very demons seeking to enslave men in their sin.

In Madagascar, the rites of exorcism are incorporated into Sunday worship at least once a month. While attending a church service, [they] saw the rite performed firsthand. No, there weren't any spinning heads. Rather, everything seemed like a normal worship service. Set together with readings from Scripture, hymns, prayers and even a short sermon, the exorcism certainly was a sight to remember!

The exorcism itself had two parts: casting the demon out and speaking Christ back in. And while it sounds easy enough, the dynamic of the service was astounding. As [Boyle] observed the ritual, the contrast between the loud shouting, fists waving, scowls and cursing at the devil on the one hand, and the soft whispers of comfort and peace on the other was startling.

The shepherds . . . who were commissioned to perform the exorcism believe that once the demon is gone, the Gospel, with all of its healing and consolation, must be the diet of the exorcised, the salve for a wounded soul.

The shepherds would touch the faces of the exorcised, whisper in their ears and read passages from Holy Scripture of our Lord's love and mercy for His own. The whole experience was utterly pastoral. It's this work of mercy that frees those who are literally bound by their sin, flesh and the devil. . . .

In Scripture, as in Madagascar today, the exorcism of demons has everything to do with the mercy of Christ. For Jesus, exorcism is not a battle of opposites; it isn't a struggle

between good and evil, between God and demi-god. Exorcism is a work of Christ's mercy—a gift of healing and release where God alone frees the victim from the devil's grasp.

Exorcism is a prescription of Christ's mercy for the ailing demon-possessed. Jesus applied to sinners is precisely the Gospel's work of mercy that's needed for all times and all places, especially for those on the island nation of Madagascar. While there's much to learn here about how this relates to our situation in America, we can nevertheless take great comfort in the impact of the Gospel in all its expressions, exorcism included!"¹

This article from *The Lutheran Witness* in 2011 highlights something that we easily forget. Demons—evil angels—are real. They were real in the time of Jesus, and they are just as real today. As Martin Luther penned in "A Mighty Fortress," "The old evil foe Now means deadly woe; Deep guile and great might Are his dread arms in fight; On earth is not his equal." Indeed, the Bible tells us that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan and his evil angels unceasingly wage war against God's divine order of the State and the family. It is the demonic forces of the devil who tempt people to immorality, lust, covetousness, murder, gossip, and so on.

The activity of Satan and his evil angels is especially directed at the Church—believers in Jesus Christ by grace through faith. Behind everything that harms the Church are the evil spirits. They bring about the inattention of the hearers of the Word so that believers become lax in hearing and learning the Word. The evil angels and the devil attack us to that we are

¹ Geoff Boyle, "Exorcism as Mercy," *The Lutheran Witness*, August 2, 2011, <https://witness.lcms.org/2011/exorcism-as-mercy-8-2011/>.

tempted to no longer hold the inspired and inerrant Word in Scripture sacred and special as the Word of God. Throughout the world, persecution and oppression of the Church by the State and organizations within the State are a result of the activity of the devil and the evil spirits. For example, this past Monday, Päivi Räsänen, a former member of Parliament of Finland, and Bishop Pohjola of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland went on trial in Finland for hate speech. They were promoting the Biblical definition of marriage as between a man and a woman and so opposing homosexuality as a God-pleasing lifestyle. They face the possibility of six years in prison.

“The old evil foe Now means deadly woe” especially for all believers in Christ, His Church. The devil and the evil angels, along with the world and our sinful nature, wage war against you and me so that they might deceive us and mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice (*Small Catechism*, Sixth Petition). And yes, demonic possession does still take place. The evil angels may take possession of a person by dwelling in her or him so that the individual, robbed of the use of his or her reason and will, becomes an involuntary instrument of Satan.

This isn't Hollywood fiction. This is Biblical reality. And whether we see it in demonic possession, sickness, sin, or death, these are manifestations of creation's bondage in its fallenness. Indeed, every single person conceived and born is under the power of Satan until God's grace and power delivers him or her from the devil's power and transfers her or him into the Kingdom of His Son, Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:13, “[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

That is the work of Christ Jesus for us and all humanity. The mission of Jesus was set against the devil and his demonic forces. When they came face to face with the Incarnate Son of God, the demon cried out, "I know you—who you are—the Holy One of God! Have you come to destroy us?" Oh yes! Jesus had come to destroy sin, Satan, and death and to set humanity, and all creation itself, free. What Scripture did Jesus read in the synagogue at Nazareth in our Gospel last Sunday? Isaiah 61, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18 NET).

All authority in heaven and on earth is given to the Lord Christ so that He alone could accomplish this freedom, this release, for us and all people. Jesus' casting out demons by the power and authority of His Word, Jesus' rebuking the fever of Peter's mother-in-law, Jesus' healing the sick and those with various diseases points us to the ultimate release from Satan's bondage won by Jesus' death and resurrection. This might be called the ultimate exorcism!

At the cross and empty tomb, Jesus, the Holy One of God, rescued and reclaimed us from powers we cannot overcome. By His death on the cross, Jesus paid the entire penalty for your sin and guilt. He destroyed the power of sin to enslave you. He defeated Satan by obeying His Father's will throughout His earthly life, even going all the way to the cross, all in your place and in mine. St. John tells us, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8 ESV). Jesus, the Holy One, has done that through His death and resurrection. "Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We

tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged, the deed is done; One little word can fell him."

The Word of Christ's authority and power sends the devil reeling. The Word of Christ's death and resurrection causes the whole host of evil angels to tremble with fear. For the dominion of God over the evil angels is present when Jesus is present with His Word of power and authority. They know Him and His authority and power—and they shudder (James 2:19). Our Father in heaven through faith in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit has provided us with the Word of Christ, Baptism, Absolution, the Lord's Supper, and the gift of prayer as armor and weapons against the assaults of the evil one.

Our hope and refuge in the battle against Satan and the evil angels are found in the Lord Christ alone. He has freed us from Satan's tyranny by His death and resurrection. Through the authority and power of the Risen Christ and His Word, you are "strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:11–14 ESV). This is our confidence of faith in our Risen Lord, as hymnwriter Paul Gerhard (1607-1676) penned:

4 Now hell, its prince, the devil,
Of all their pow'r are shorn;
Now I am safe from evil,
And sin I laugh to scorn.
Grim death with all its might
Cannot my soul affright;
It is a pow'rless form,
Howe'er it rave and storm.

6 Now I will cling forever
To Christ, my Savior true;
My Lord will leave me never,
Whate'er He passes through.
He rends death's iron chain;
He breaks through sin and pain;
He shatters hell's grim thrall;
I follow Him through all.