

"Legion, Against One"

Text: Luke 8:26-39

May God the Holy Spirit fill you with the sort of confidence and faith that never knows a moment of doubt that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior – and that you have and need no other. Amen.

Fellow Servants of the Triune God:

I'm guessing all of us have been fooled by click bait – those internet headlines that promise "shocking new revelations" and "bombshell breaking news." While those sorts of promises are seldom kept, I would imagine that you have all had real-life or movie "moments" where you heard something that actually did shock or horrify you; something that just made your jaw drop, your skin crawl, or that sent a shiver down your spine. If you're like me, you find it harder and harder to be "shocked." We've become numbed to it all by the media's never-ending quest for attention by their focus on the sensational and shocking. They've long known that the more appalling and salacious the news, the more viewers they tend to get and the more money they thereby rake in.

There's actually a danger here that we need to recognize. The greater our desensitization, the more likely we are to downplay or ignore the real and terrifying dangers that actually *do* threaten us on a daily basis. Satan is behind all of this, as he is behind the trivializing of things like hell and demons.

This morning's text ought to serve as an effective test as to just how successful the devil has been in desensitizing you, personally, to that which is truly terrifying. We need to ask ourselves if we have been trained to ignore or trivialize the spiritual enemies that threaten us. Our text accomplishes this self-test by allowing us to listen in on Jesus' conversation with a demon. That text is found in the Gospel of Luke, the 8th Chapter:

^{ESV}(Luke 8:26-39) Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." ²⁹ For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man.

(For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. ³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. ³² Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. ³⁴ When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. ³⁶ And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷ Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

These are God's Words, perfect in every way. May God the Holy Spirit grant you the grace to trust that these are God's Words and to be continually protected by the power of these words. To this end we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.**" Amen.

Sermon themes can sometimes be more difficult than the sermon itself. The Word of God is always new and fresh, which means themes and sermons should always be new and fresh. Sometimes it takes effort to resist the "cute" and to go with that which actually builds up and teaches. So also I once read a theme for our text this morning: "*The Nude, Rude, Crude, Lewd Dude with a 'Tude.*" Clever, maybe, but clever isn't much help when the devil comes calling. In such cases, "clever" usually turns and runs.

Pretty safe to say that everyone here has heard his or her fair share of cute or clever sayings over the years – clichés that deal, more or less, with our general topic this morning. How about these: "*When the going gets tough...*" You can finish on your own, can't you?

"...the tough get going." "It's not the size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of the fight in the dog." "Live to fight another day." "If we don't hang together, we will all hang separately." The list is long, to say the least.

The problem, again, is that "cute" and "clever" tend to minimize the actual threat. Dump a little raw fear onto cute and it melts like cotton candy in the rain. Given what we know about our spiritual enemies, cute just won't cut it.

What will? When we are talking about Satan and his minions, only sober truth will do. So it is that you don't hear Peter making cute when he talks about the devil. He says things like: **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."** Not cute at all, but very sobering – and the result is intended to be very effective.

The line in our text that ought to both chill and sober us is the demon's response when Jesus asks its name: **"And he said, 'Legion,' for many demons had entered him."** Add to that the fact that these demons had entered or "possessed" this man and that by their power he was given super-human strength and an animal ferocity, and we quickly see that there is nothing cute about this situation. Nothing at all.

That's the first message of our text – a frank and candid look at just what Christians (now as then) are up against.

If you've ever had occasion to look into the eyes of death row inmates, you've seen firsthand what no Hollywood actor could ever accurately portray: convicted, hard-core criminals who have no pity, no remorse, no compassion, and – worst of all – nothing to lose. It's in the eyes. You can't fake that. You can't "act" that. I've seen that only once, when I visited a death row inmate next door to Ted Bundy. I stopped visiting the man when he got violent during one of our meetings. He was there because he had robbed, assaulted, and then stabbed a woman between 14 and 20 times. Just before his execution in 1990, he said in a letter to the State that his only regret was that the woman's husband hadn't also been home at the time so that he could have killed him as well.

The point is that there are absolutely, thoroughly bad people in the world. And yet as bad as human beings can get, they are as nothing compared to Satan and his evil angels. As evil, brutal, and remorseless as human beings can be, the spiritual forces that oppose us are infinitely worse. They truly have nothing whatsoever to lose. For living human beings, there is always a chance – which is why I went to visit this man

in prison. The malefactor crucified next to Jesus was saved at the 11th hour. No hope remains for the fallen angels. Theirs is a wickedness beyond our comprehension, an evil that cannot be measured in human terms. They have no hope, only hatred. The Bible tells us that they are reserved only for the fires of hell.

You can hear that in the demon's response to Jesus, can't you? Listen again to their answer, recorded in a parallel account in Matthew 8: **"What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"** That's the point, isn't it? The demons have nothing to lose because they know with a dreadful certainty that nothing and no one can ever help them, ever rescue them. They know only helplessness, bitter frustration, rage, and absolute hatred for God and everything he loves. More than just "death row," they sit on "eternity row" – awaiting only the fires of hell for all eternity.

In our text we see a dramatic contrast, for just as the possessed human being was powerless against the demons, so also we learn how powerless the demons were against Jesus. Not that that stops their hatred or brutality. They just look for a new target, a new victim or victims – which means you and me. They are already judged and condemned, so they seek only to destroy the living. Knowing that Jesus would never allow them to enter other human beings, they beg permission to enter a herd of pigs. Other than the fact that the raising and eating of pigs was forbidden to Jews at that time, we have little understanding of such things. Did the pigs essentially commit suicide when they felt the presence of the demons, or did the demons simply seek to kill, to destroy, whatever they touched? Jesus allowed the unclean to enter the unclean, but only the swine perished. The demons remain.

A dark and terrifying scene, isn't it? That, however, is the reality of the world in which we live. Our enemies, though unseen, are every bit as real as the building you occupy and the seat in which you are sitting, and their unrelenting intentions are more evil than anything we can fully imagine. And their number is Legion.

That's the bad news. The good news is that that is exactly why Jesus came to earth. We don't have to defeat such incredibly powerful and evil forces because Jesus did it for us – in our place and as our Substitute, our Champion. He understood both the depth of the evil and the purveyors or authors of that evil. He also knew that you and I were simply incapable of ever succeeding against such things.

Luther captured this truth in his famous hymn, A Mighty Fortress: *"With might of ours could naught be done, soon were our loss effected. But for us fights the Valiant One – Whom God himself elected. Ask ye, 'Who is this?' Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord and there's none other God; He holds the field forever."* Nor was Luther ignorant of just what we were up against. From the third verse of that same hymn: *"Tho' 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."* That "word," of course, is Jesus – the One.

If you are anything like me you will admit – as I do – that you tend to lose sight of the true nature of the struggle that we are in and the danger that we face. And if that is true, then it is also true that you and I also therefore lose sight of just how desperately we need our Savior and just how indispensable and magnificent a champion he really is. The man in our text was helpless in the face of such power, such evil. He had no ability, no inner strength to rid himself of the demons that possessed him. It's the same way with sin. You and I had (and have) no power to rid ourselves of the condemnation of our sin, and it was our sin that had separated us from God and excluded us from God's heaven. Our sins had made us the playthings of the demons. As the demons held the man of the Gerasenes in their grip, so our sins held us in a tempered steel grip from which we could never hope to break free.

But that is exactly what Jesus came to do for us – that is exactly what he *did* do for us on Calvary's cross. He met evil head-on, and prevailed. He did so by consistently resisting all demonic temptation - keeping God's holy law *perfectly* – and then freeing us from our slavery to demonic forces by offering his perfect life as a blood sacrifice on the cross. In so doing, the power of the demons was broken, shattered, destroyed. The evil against which we were powerless was crushed, broken. The penalty for our sins has been paid in full. Legion, defeated by One.

The war has been won, but don't miss the ending in our text. There are still many who refuse Jesus' victory. The people of the Gerasenes, for example, promptly drove Jesus from their region. They essentially traded him for pigs. I doubt it looks much different today when human beings discard Jesus and Christianity for something like money, pleasure, or earthly fame and power – eternal life, traded for "pigs."

Yet not all rejected, did they. Here, as elsewhere, there always seemed to be a remnant that was saved. So we hear that the man from whom the demons were cast became a disciple, and a witness. Though he

wanted to join Jesus' entourage, God had other plans for him. He, like most of us here today, was sent home to be Jesus' witness there. Our calling is the same – simply to tell our neighbors ***"what great things God has done for you."*** To do so, you and I have to first come to understand those "great things." Our text for this morning helps to open our eyes. Our enemy *is* Legion – a countless hoard with power and evil beyond our comprehension. Yet our one Friend and Ally is Jesus Christ, who has both fought for us and has credited his victory to us. It is enough, for this One can and will continue to protect us from the terrifying Legion. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV (Isaiah 65:1-9) I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that was not called by my name. ² I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; ³ a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; ⁴ who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat pig's flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels; ⁵ who say, "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you." These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day. ⁶ Behold, it is written before me: "I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their lap ⁷ both your iniquities and your fathers' iniquities together, says the LORD; because they made offerings on the mountains and insulted me on the hills, I will measure into their lap payment for their former deeds." ⁸ Thus says the LORD: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, 'Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,' so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all. ⁹ I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and from Judah possessors of my mountains; my chosen shall possess it, and my servants shall dwell there.

ESV (Galatians 3:23-4:7) Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. **ESV Galatians 4:1** I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Second Sunday after Pentecost – June 23, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 536 *(Red Hymnal)*

"Awake My Soul and with the Sun"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. *(Red Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 65:1-9) Our first reading communicates God's love for fallen man, in the face of man's rejection of God. Our reading also makes clear that such rejection will certainly not go unpunished. God does not make idle threats. Yet note also the gospel promise with which our reading concludes. A remnant will be preserved, and from that remnant the Messiah would come. It is in that Messiah that we place our faith, our confidence, and our eternal lives.

The Second Lesson: (Galatians 3:23-4:7) The Law was given to maintain order until the time was right for God the Father to send his Son. The Mosaic Law, given to fallen mankind, was never intended to save. It was intended to preserve the Jewish race until that race could give birth to Jesus Christ. As Old Testament believers were not saved by keeping the law but by faith in God's promise to send the Savior, so we too are now saved through faith in that same Lord Jesus, who has paid our sin debt.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 22. *(Red Hymnal)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 371 *(Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)*

"Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 8:26-39 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

"Legion, Against One"

The Offertory – page 22. *(Red Hymnal)*

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 371 *(Stanzas 5-7) (Red Hymnal)*

"Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness"

The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Red Hymnal page 24ff)*

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis *(Red Hymnal page 30)*

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 46 *(Red Hymnal)*

"On What has Now been Sown"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (34) Average (34)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Quarterly Voters Meeting
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour

CLC News – Teacher Paul Tiefel has returned the calls to both Faith of Markesan and Holy Trinity of West Columbia. Teacher Matthew Kranz is considering the call to St. John's of Okabena. Pastor David Reim is considering the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Pastor Thomas Schuetze has accepted the call of Prince of Peace of Loveland to serve as their vacancy pastor.

Quarterly Voters Meeting – A Quarterly Voters Meeting has been scheduled for this morning following the fellowship hour.

CLC General Pastoral Conference – After much study and discussion, the CLC Pastoral Conference voted to recommend to the 2020 CLC Convention that it not ratify the Joint Statement of 2015. Although the document does not contain false doctrine, it was judged to be inadequate for the intended purpose for which it was written. Pastor Roehl will provide a summary following the service this morning, and a report at the Quarterly Voters meeting later this morning.

Looking Ahead – This year's **Vacation Bible School** has been scheduled for August 5-9. Sessions will run from 6:30-8:30 each day. Our **Annual Church Picnic** has been scheduled for the following Sunday, August 11th. The site is Hillside Lion's Park, Shelter #1.