

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany – Year B – February 5, 2012 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Mark 1:21-28 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“...that the wicked foe may have no power over me.”**

Demon possession... not exactly a topic many choose to discuss. It's probably not what you came to church today to talk about. And why not? Because we know Satan is real. We know he's powerful and he can possess one's mind and body and even their soul. We see his power and influence all around us. He is a murderer, as Scripture says. He constantly seeks to take life. We were made aware of this sobering truth in the suicide death of *Soul Train* pioneer Don Cornelius; the violence at a soccer match in Egypt; the Christian missionaries found dead in Mexico. Yes, the devil's purpose is to frustrate the plans of God, to bring chaos and disorder. He wants to destroy Christians and drag as many down to hell with him as possible.

But you did not come to church today to talk about Satan. You came today because you know all too well about the devil's influence in this world and you want to hear about Jesus' power over the devil. Jesus' power gives us comfort. We plead to our Father, "Deliver us from evil." I'm sure that many of you faithfully speak the words of Martin Luther's morning and evening prayers - one of the lines goes like this, "Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me." This morning we put our confidence in our God and ask "that the wicked foe may have no power over us." We have confidence he will answer our prayer because Jesus shows us today that he is more powerful than Satan.

Our lesson from Mark 1 takes place at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus had traveled to a little town called Capernaum, located on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. It was the Sabbath day, Saturday for the Jews - the day of physical rest and spiritual refreshment. Jesus and his disciples walked to the local synagogue, a building used by the Jews for worship and to study the Scriptures. Just as Jesus began to teach the people, a demon possessed man stood up and cried out.

The first question we have is, "Why was there a demon possessed man in the synagogue?" We can only speculate as to the exact circumstances, but we can apply what we know about the spirituality of the Jews at this time in Israel's history. The religious leaders of the Jews had been teaching the people that good works were necessary to earn God's favor. Salvation could be attained by being a good person. They abandoned preaching the truth that the promised Savior alone would provide the perfect life, that he alone would save them from sin and death. Because this wasn't taught there was a great spiritual vacuum in Israel. In rushed Satan and all his demons, living very comfortably in God's Promised Land, so comfortable that he brings a man possessed by demons right into the house of God.

You've heard the phrase, "Wherever God builds a church, Satan builds a chapel." Jesus was there to teach the Word of God - the truth. The demon was there to interrupt the Son of God. His purpose was to distract the people from the truth, because the truth that Jesus taught could save those people from hell. The devil felt threatened because he knew who Jesus was. He confessed his name, "the Holy One of God." But Jesus would not allow the devil and his demons to confess his name to the people, "Be quiet!" he commanded. He flexed his muscles and ordered the demon, "Come out of him!" By the simple and yet powerful Word of his mouth, the evil spirit immediately obeys, and the people in the synagogue are amazed at his authority.

One of the commentaries I read this week said, "Often those churches seem most united and peaceful where false doctrine is given the most room. But where the Word is preached in its truth and purity, there the devil is most busy stirring up strife in doctrine and in life, so that people will turn away from the truth." We saw this in Jesus' ministry - we see it in our own lives. We're going to look at both of those areas: doctrine and life.

First of all, Satan is busy stirring up strife in doctrine so that people turn away from the truth. What is the single most important doctrine in Scripture? That by God's grace he saved us from sin, death and the devil through his Son Jesus. That is the central message of the Bible. We know it, study it, live it - it is our hope for the future and our comfort for the present. So what does Satan do? He gets into our head and questions that truth, "Are you sure God loves you? Because, seriously, have you thought recently about your past? Those teenage years and all that stuff you did in college and in the stuff you did with your Army buddies. Are you sure you are saved, cause seriously, you're a big hypocrite. You come to church, go to Bible study and then you go home and forget to do all the stuff God told you about in church." Just like that our conscience is seized with terror so that we wonder, "Does God really love me? How could he?" We turn away from the truth.

Secondly, Satan is busy stirring up strife in life so that people turn away from the truth. It's not too hard to identify the strife that Satan is busy stirring up in my life. I can ask you a few simple questions to get you started, "Are there issues that you wish you could work out in your marriage? Are you struggling with parenting your children or grandchildren? Are you dealing with unemployment? Are you struggling with the transition from combat to civilian life? Are you fearful of what the future holds for you?" When Satan brings these stressors into your life you cry out with the Psalm writer, "O LORD, why are you so far from me? How long, LORD, how long?" When God seems to be taking his sweet time it's then that we as sinful human beings have a tendency to stay away from God, we abandon church and the Bible study and even abandon him in prayer. We turn away from the truth.

Some days I don't have the strength to keep going. Some days I don't have the will to stand up and fight against that roaring lion who never tires of pursuing me, who never stops looking for a way to devour me. Then God opens the pages of his Word to me and I listen very carefully to this story and it cheers my heart because then I know that my Jesus has more power than the devil and all his demons. God opens the pages of his Almighty Word and says to my weary spirit, "**The reason the Son of Man appeared was to destroy the devil's work.**" (1John 3:8)

We know that the devil's work is to keep unbelievers in their darkness of their unbelief. His work is to constantly attack God's children until they fall away from faith. His work is to frustrate God's plan to save the people of the world from an eternity of suffering in hell. Satan knew about the promise of a Savior. When the Savior came, he tried with all his might to frustrate those plans: the frightening number of demon possessions at that time, the great number of people with illnesses and diseases, the 40 day and 40 night marathon temptation of Jesus in the desert... Satan tried really hard to make Jesus give up, to make salvation too much work for him.

Jesus never tired. He never gave up... because you were too important to him. He didn't want to see you fall under Satan's tyrannical rule. Jesus frustrated the plans of Satan. Jesus never fell for the lies of Satan. Whenever Satan tried to get Jesus to question God's Word, Jesus always went back to Scripture and used God's Word as his weapon against Satan. Remember when Jesus was in the desert 40 days and nights, he fasted, and he was hungry! Satan said to him, "You're the Son of God. Use your power to turn these rocks to bread!" To which Jesus replied, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus lived on God's promises. He always trusted in his Father's promises, even when he was on the brink of death. He trusted his Father to raise his dead body again. And by his faithfulness to the Word of God Jesus frustrated the devil's plans – by his life he provided the life God required of you and me. By his death on the cross, he took away Satan's power to accuse you of your sins. For on the cross Jesus allowed his Father to accuse him of all sins, even yours and mine. Jesus' victory cry, "It is finished!" rang all the way down to the depths of hell and Satan shuddered.

Do you see, my dear weary friends, how God's Almighty Word sends Satan running? God's Almighty Word comforts my soul and reassures me, "Yes, God does love me!" – in spite of my past. He proved his love to me by sending his Son to live and die in my place. God's Word comforts me and reassures me, "Yes, God has saved even me!" He proved it through the promises he made to me through water and Word. God has freed you from Satan's power and made you his child through the power of Baptism. We witnessed the disarming of Satan this morning at the Baptismal font. And then we sang in the hymn, "Satan hear this proclamation, I am baptized into Christ. Drop your ugly accusations, I am not so soon enticed. Now that to the font I've traveled all your might has come unraveled and against your tyranny, God my Lord unites with me." God will come to you through his Son's body and blood in a few minutes to reassure you, "This is for the forgiveness of your sins. Yes, I still love you. Yes, I still have the power over Satan."

And now, even though I know that Satan will not stop attacking me until I am in the grave, he will not stop accusing me, I know that I will fall for his lies again and again, I know that I will feel his breath on my neck, whispering in my ear yet again today and tomorrow, I know that he cannot harm me. Though he may accuse me and cause me to stumble, he must flee when I arm myself with the Word of God. God's Word tells me, (James 4.7) "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (Rom 8.38-39) "I am convinced that neither angels nor demons... will be able to separate me from the love of God." (1 Pet 5.8,9,10) "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith. ...God will make you strong, firm and steadfast."

Since these are the promises God makes to me, then I will resist the devil with the might that Jesus gives me. I will make God's Word living and active in my home. I will daily study it and meditate on it. I will make worship on Sunday morning a habit. I will gather with other believers for Bible study - for the Word of God make Satan flee. I will be active in prayer, pleading to God, "Deliver us from the evil one," and he will run away. We will put our conscience at rest and our confidence in our God when we pray, "Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen."