

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL

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Worship Series: *Unleashed: God's Words Possess God's Power*

Service Theme: *Through the Word, the Lord Crushes Evil*

Sermon Theme: *Dealing with Demons (June 19, 2022)*

Luke 8:26-39

They're coming. As you peer over the walls, you can see the dust rising in the distance. A rumbling like thunder fills your ears as the feet of thousands upon thousands of well-trained, well-equipped soldiers draw closer; a powerful enemy with one purpose they'll stop at nothing to accomplish—to destroy you, your loved ones, and your kingdom. How do you respond to such an enemy?

You could do nothing. You could close your eyes and plug your ears, telling yourself, "There's no enemy army! That's just something superstitious people made up." That might give you temporary peace, but not once that real, powerful enemy is breathing down your neck.

Or, you could become hysterical with terror, throw up your hands in despair, assuming you're hopeless to withstand such a powerful, ruthless enemy. While that might be a more realistic response than the first, you still end up getting destroyed.

Or, you can acknowledge that the enemy is powerful and dangerous, but then marshal your resources and strength to defend yourself against that enemy. Which is the best option?

I'm not asking as some hypothetical exercise, but because the Bible tells us that this is a legitimate threat-- a vast, powerful, well-equipped army, intent on destroying you, your loved ones, and your kingdom—that is, Satan and his demons, the forces of evil. So, how do you respond?

There are skeptics who chalk Satan and the demons up to just another fairy tale attempt to try to explain why bad things happen in the world, closing their eyes and plugging their ears to Scripture's warnings. In

fact, a 2009 Barna poll revealed that around 60% of Christians don't believe that Satan really exists, but that he's just symbolic of evil.

Interestingly though, 11 years after that first Barna poll, a 2020 Barna poll revealed that 56% of Americans—both Christians and non-Christians—now believe that Satan is a real spiritual being who influences people's lives, while only 51% believe in the Biblical God! Hard to ignore evil over the last decade, right? And of those who believe Satan and his demons, many live in constant fear of demonic powers, like people from religious cultures in Africa, South America, Asia, or Native Americans, who trust in witch doctors or shamans to keep them safe.

But friends, today's sermon text shows us there's a better way of **Dealing with Demons** than denial, or despair!

First, we need to remind ourselves what demons are. The Bible tells us that sometime during the 6 days of Creation, God created angels—powerful spirit beings who do his will. But sometime after God finished his perfect creation, an angel, now called Satan, led a large number of the angels in rebellion against God. They were defeated, and cast out of heaven, as Revelation depicts, ***"So the great dragon was cast out, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."***

Since angels are powerful, these fallen angels are also powerful. Only instead of doing God's will, the demons now oppose God's will. Which means they have one main goal—to destroy that which God loves most—his people. That means, every day, there's a powerful army trying to destroy you. Scared? Don't be. Today's sermon text shows us why.

Jesus' disciples must have still felt like they were trying to catch their breath. Just that night, they'd seen Jesus calmly reprimand a deadly storm on the Sea of Galilee with just a few words, ***Quiet! Be still!*** and the storm listened! Then, they came ashore on the opposite side of the sea, in the Gentile-heavy region of the Gerasenes.

As soon as they stepped out of the boat, a demon-possessed man came and fell at Jesus' feet, loudly crying out, "***What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!***"

Skeptics might claim this man wasn't really demon-possessed, but simply suffering from a mental illness people in Jesus' day didn't yet understand. Certainly, the man shows some characteristics of mental illness: he stayed isolated in solitary places, like the tombs he lived in; he went around naked; he would sometimes cut himself with stones; he would commit random acts of violence against passersby; he would loudly wail day and night. But what mental illness can account for his superhuman strength that allowed him to continually break out of even the strongest chains and bonds?

This man's actions show us that demons possess people in order to oppress them—to bring violence, pain, humiliation and isolation on them. And ultimately, because the demons know eternal punishment awaits them, and that their time is short—Note how "***they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss***"-- they're urgently trying to drag as many people to hell with them as possible.

And this was no ordinary demon-possession. When Jesus asked the man, "***What is your name?***" he replied, "***Legion***" because as Luke explains, "***many demons had gone into him.***" In the Roman military, a Legion consisted of 6,000 soldiers, and based on the 2,000ish pigs we'll hear about shortly, this man was possessed by likely thousands of powerful demons.

And yet, face to face with thousands of the enemy's powerful forces, notice Jesus' complete power over them. Notice how they can't not acknowledge who Jesus is—the Son of the Most High God! Notice how often they beg Jesus for mercy—not to torture them, not to order them into the Abyss, to let them go into the nearby herd of pigs. Notice how they could only do that with Jesus' permission! As the Son of God, Jesus holds complete power and control over Satan and his demons. This isn't just a simple matter of authority, like how your children all perfectly listen to you, fathers. This is a matter of complete control! They could do nothing to stop him from driving them out!

What the townspeople couldn't stop with even the strongest chains, Jesus drives out with a few words, "***Come out of this man, you evil spirit!***" And thousands of demons come shrieking out, showing their destructive purposes by driving thousands of pigs to drown in the sea. Jesus is the reason we can face demons without terror and despair!

But is this really something we need to worry about today? Does demon possession really happen anymore? Actually, demon possession is still fairly common in parts of the world like Africa, Asia, and South America, because often, the religious practices of those cultures include witchcraft, sorcery, and invoking the dead or spirits and demons. And as many of those religious cultures are also being practiced here, and as participation in occult practices increases, it's becoming more common in America too. While I'm not saying every mental illness is demon possession, is it possible that we sometimes diagnose people with mental illness, when their behavior is the product of demon possession?

So how exactly does demon possession happen? Is it random, like Terry's out mowing his lawn and BOOM—demon possessed? No. Since Jesus holds complete power over Satan and his demons, anyone who stays connected to Christ by faith is protected. The Bible tells us that Satan's power is limited, that he can only do what God allows him to. Picture Satan like a dog staked to a chain in the backyard. How far can that dog get? Only as far as the chain allows. So, as long as you stay outside that chain's reach, you're safe, no matter how ferocious the dog is. But if you leave safety, and walk into the range the dog's chain can reach, now it can sink its teeth into you.

Demon possession works the same way. When people remove themselves from Christ, and wander into Satan's striking distance, he'll sink his demons into them. False religions that attempt communication with demons or spirits, or occult practices like Ouija boards, divination, sorcery, and voodoo are all in Satan's realm. And if you call upon the forces of evil, they'll answer.

I've never experienced it personally, but I know pastors who have visited homes where strange, supernatural occurrences take place—

rapidly changing temperatures, people speaking with unnatural voices and declaring the pastor's past secret sins which no one could possibly know about. There are ministries, many in foreign mission fields, dedicated entirely to helping people with demon possession.

And do you know how they combat the power of Satan and his demonic forces? The same way Legion was driven out. With the simple, powerful words of Jesus. They pray the Lord's Prayer. They read aloud from God's Word. They proclaim Jesus' promises. They ask God to expel the demon in Jesus' name. No magic incantations, potions, or complex exorcism rites. Just the simple words of Jesus. Because God's words possess God's power to crush evil! So, we can fight against the power of Satan and his demons by acknowledging their existence and power. By steering clear of everything that puts us in their realm, and by clinging in faith to Jesus, whose words are more powerful than even 2,000 demons!

But likely, God-willing, most of us will never deal with demon-possession. However, Satan and his demons don't just attack with demon possession. Most often, they attack us with lies! As Jesus says, ***"When [Satan] lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*** They lie to us, convincing us that we know good and bad better than God; that we know what we really need better than God; that some things are more important than God. And then, once they get us to fall for their lies, they continue lying to you that God can't possibly love you anymore or forgive what you've done. They heap on their lies until they drive people to despair of God's love and forgiveness. Even if not physically possessing our bodies, certainly seeking to possess our hearts.

But again, we counteract the attacks of Satan and the demons with the powerful words of Jesus! We combat their lies with God's words of truth! We cling to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for us! As James writes, ***"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."***

Because Jesus' words don't just have power when they're coming from his mouth. They're powerful when we speak them against Satan and his demons as well! As Martin Luther wrote about Satan in his

famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," ***"One little word can fell him."***

There's a fascinating example of that in the depths of our sermon text. After Jesus drove out the demons, the townspeople found the formerly demon-possessed terrorizer of their city ***"sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind."*** Shouldn't they have rejoiced, jumping up and down, hugging each other and praising Jesus as the Son of God? But instead, we're told that, ***"they were afraid, and asked Jesus to leave them."***

That was the power of Satan and his demons at work, just as much as the actions of the demon-possessed man. They convinced those people of their lies, so that rather than being drawn to the man who had the power to crush evil, they wanted him gone.

But notice what Jesus does. Understandably, the man Jesus had freed from the demons wanted to go with him and become one of his disciples. Instead, Jesus told him, ***"Return home and tell how much God has done for you."*** And the man did. And ***"all the people were amazed."***

That's evidence of the power of Jesus' words to crush the power of evil. Because the next time Jesus came through that Gentile area where he'd been asked to leave, the crowds came out in droves to see him and hear his preaching. Why that change? Because through Jesus' powerful words from the lips of the man Jesus had healed, God was crushing Satan's lies, and the power of the demons on people's hearts. God's powerful words also transformed them, bringing them out of the darkness and into the light.

And the same is true for you. Every time you hear Jesus' powerful words, and proclaim Jesus' truth to yourself and to others, God is crushing Satan's lies and the forces of evil in your hearts. Every time you speak Jesus words, the one who drove out Legion is powerfully driving the demons out of your life too. That's why we can deal with demons without denial or despair. Because of the most powerful words Jesus spoke—his words from the cross, ***"It is finished."*** Those words

mean that your sin has been crushed eternally; that the power of evil has been crushed...eternally. So what is there to fear, when you remain connected to him who speaks, and even the demons listen?