

Most High God Luke 8:26-39 2nd Sun. After Pentecost June 23, 2019

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. 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." Today we clearly distinguish between demons and most high God.

Dear friends in Christ, I've been reading about nutrition lately, a lot about what you should or shouldn't eat. And one key to nutrition is not eliminating all the bad food from your diet, but making sure you eat the right food. That if you eat the kale with fiber, your 5 servings of fruits and veggies a day, with only a bit of fat, the food you do eat will keep you full so you don't need a whole bag of potato chips and a tub of ice cream. Why do you care? This sermon, like our text, is going to contrast the most high God and what is with him with what is not, but if it sends you on an elimination diet, that thinks you can get close to God by eliminating things, you need to listen closer.

Jesus come to the regions of Gerasenes, and a man with a demon confronts him. And here is the contrast, Jesus the Son of the most high God, and a demon possessed man. And the demon wants Jesus to let him be, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." The demon wants to be left alone, to do what he wants. He or they want freedom to do what he wants.

But what does the demon do when left alone? What does his freedom look like? What does he do when he breaks not the chains of God but even the chains of civil society that God uses to protect us. He wears what he wants, and hadn't worn clothes for a long time. He hangs out not around town or people but in desolate places. He hangs out alone and in tombs, with the dead things. That is what he does with freedom. It might sound like a teenager - wearing what they want going where they want with not rules chaining them down.

But notice what this freedom apart from God, this freedom of demons looks like. Nakedness, Loneliness. Death. That is what freedom apart from God looks like.

And even when God is merciful, when God says they need not go to the abyss, to hell, when Legion asks to go into the pigs into unclean animals still separated from God, death still results. The whole herd of pigs still goes to watery death, not as a judgment, but because freedom apart from God leads to death. In fact, freedom apart from God is slavery to death. And we might say that Hell is prepared for the devil and his angels, as Scripture teaches, but in the end, it is where they want to go.

And the man? He is at Jesus feet. He sees the most high God and falls at his feet. That is being in his right mind. That is being clothed, not just with clothes but with Christ. And we too, if we are in our right minds, we who have been baptized and called by his name, will remain at Jesus feet and hear his words and let him clothe us with his righteousness.

We see this freedom in baptism. In the rite of baptism, we receive the sign of the cross on our forehead and over our heart as a sign that evil will not remain in us. In the sacrament of baptism, we are washed and given the name of the most high God, father, son and spirit. Here we remember the old man is drowned daily with his pigs and demons, and a new man arises, with Jesus and at his feet. We are free to sit at the feet of the most high God.

How much we remember Mary and Martha, Martha, feeling enslaved by service, Martha who is troubled by many things. Yet Mary amidst those same pressures is free to sit at his feet. So also with this man, clothed and in his right mind at Jesus feet.

Consider again life with our without the most high God. Consider the people of the town and the man.

They saw what God had done. They saw that the most high God among them as he cast out the demons, as the pigs were drowned. And rather than praise God, they feared. They liked their rules, their pigs, their wealth too much. They liked the current order of things. And the most High God might upset that - new rules, new life, who knew where that would lead. Oh, sure, they still all died. But who could hope for anything better, and at least they still had barbecue, and order, and a sense they were in control, while they lived. They also wanted their freedom without a most high God. They wanted neither gods nor demons among them. So they asked Jesus to leave. They asked God to leave.

And God is merciful and gives them what they want. He leaves. God's judgment just confirms what they asked for.

How many times we do want Jesus to deal with demons - with death - with pain - but don't want his further presence - we like our money and our sports and our gossip. We want to see the racy movie and use the language the world uses. We want to look like everyone else and talk about how many pigs we own. And that might mean that God can't be in this hour, this conversation, this relationship. He has to leave.

Yet not so the man, the new disciple at Jesus' feet. He begs to go with Jesus, and Jesus' promise at the end of Matthew is for him as well, "Lo, I am with you always." And when Jesus sends him, he gladly tells what God has done for him. That is what we are called to do, but it begins by seeing what the most high God has done for us. That he has freed us from sin and death and demons and the devil. He has cast out the prince of this world at the cross, and we are truly free.

What good do you see and do you share it? Jeff helped me fix my car yesterday. I put it on Facebook and told my friends, because I rejoiced that he helped me. Yet how little I said of what God has done for me this week. How little I heeded the word Christ gave this man. God has done a greater good for me today. He has done a greater good for you too.

Luther says that whatever you look to for your good, that is your god. In fact he said that God comes from the word good - a questionably etymology, but good wisdom. There are many gods and demons, cars and money and children and wealth, that we spend our time and effort on. But there is only one most high God, who died to redeem us and frees us to sit at his feet. Sit at his feet, hear his word, and tell what mighty deeds the Lord has done for you. Amen.