

St. LUKE 11.14-28  
An Exposition for the  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent A (2017)

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from Almighty God, the Father, the Son ✠ and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

First, let me thank you, on behalf of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's Office of International Missions, for letting me speak to you today, both in this divine service, and afterward about the mission work that my wife, Deaconess Cheryl Naumann, and I have been called to do in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean – a region signified by this stole I am wearing, woven in Guatemala.

The text for this morning's consideration is the Holy Gospel where St. Luke tells us about a time in Jesus' ministry when his teaching was interrupted by an enthusiastic fan: *‘...a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, <sup>q</sup>“Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!”* <sup>28</sup> *But he said, <sup>r</sup>“Blessed rather are those <sup>s</sup>who hear the word of God and <sup>t</sup>keep it!”*

Since ‘angelology’ has become an interest of mine, I am always interested in whatever the Scriptures have to reveal to us about angels, the good ones and the bad ones.

Today’s Gospel reading begins with an account of our Lord Jesus Christ, as an exorcist – someone who exorcises – or removes – demons from people.

Once, after he had finished delivering a man from a demon that had robbed him of his speech, Jesus had to defend himself against those who completely misunderstood what he was doing.

And, after proving the absurdity of their accusations – that he was driving out demons by the power of Beelzebul – Jesus went on to warn them about what they, as a ‘generation’ were doing by rejecting Him.

His warning was that they were like a formerly demon possessed man, who failed to use the freedom he had been given to fill his soul with God’s gifts, but instead just focused on his own work of ‘housekeeping’.

*He said, ‘When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first.”*

In the account of these words in St. Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus explains the problem further.

*Jesus said, Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

*Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*

*For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

*The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*

*The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.*

Now we should not, as some have done, take this teaching of Jesus and just apply it to Judaism. As in, 'the Jews had Jesus among them, and they rejected Him, so 'seven more demons came into that religion so that the state of Judaism became worse afterward than it had been before Jesus had been among them'.

Be that as it may, the application of this parable of the demon possessed man is much more disturbingly personal than that.

Did you know, that in the liturgy of baptism, an exorcism was traditionally part of that sacrament? Before the baptism took place, the words were added, 'Depart unclean spirit and make way for the Holy Spirit'. Those words are still an option in Lutheran baptisms – just look in the altar-book for the LSB!

Yet, whether or not those words were used in the billions of baptisms that have taken place down through the ages, how many human beings have been baptized, usually in infancy, but afterward – having been cleansed by that sacrament – were not then raised to fill their souls with God's gifts, but instead left neglected, empty and vulnerable to invasion from evil forces so that the state of those baptized persons was worse afterward than it was before?

The same thing goes for those who are confirmed, but whose family cease to cultivate the faith of confirmands beyond confirmation.

Did you know that Hitler was both baptized and confirmed? Pictures from LIFE magazine in 1938 show that he even served as a godfather at a baptism. Yet, what happened to *him*?

Yes, the words of Jesus in His parable of the demon-possessed man are a clear warning for baptized Christians, for you and for me, and for our children and grand-children.

And we, in international missions, are not complacent in the case of people in our region who have been baptized or 'christened' into the Church.

Many of them were not raised in the biblical knowledge of the truth, and so live in fear of demons, and resort to superstition, and voodoo to deal with their fears, when if only their souls were nourished with the gifts of God that are their baptismal birthright, their lives would be quite transformed.

St. Matthew's account of this same dispute we are looking at from Luke 11, also tells us

*While he (Jesus) was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

So, it may well have been the case that Jesus mother – the Blessed Virgin Mary – was actually within earshot of hearing it, when, *a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him (Jesus), "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"*

So Mary may have heard both things: A woman rightly call her 'blessed', and – at the same time - her Son teach that the ultimate family of Jesus, are not those connected to Him biologically, but those connected to Him spiritually, by faith in Him.

Today, as some of you may know, is my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. So, I'd like to relate to you one of my earliest memories as a toddler almost 60 years ago. Our parents used to lead us in family devotions most days back then. And one of the earliest Bible verses I can remember hearing was from today's Gospel reading. And I can still remember the way my dad, Ted Naumann, raised his eyebrows for emphasis when he quoted Jesus words, 'Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and **keep** it'. And the emphasis was on that word 'keep'.

For many years I considered those words of Jesus a call to obedience – taking a reference to the word of God as just to the law of God – as in the words of the rich young ruler who boasted to Jesus', 'all these commandments have I kept from my youth'.

Yet sixty years later, I can assure you, with great certainty, that - like you - I have broken all these commandments from my youth, rather than obeyed them. So what is to become of us poor, miserable sinners?

Thanks be to God, there is more to the word of God than just His rules, God's laws, and His commandments - 'which I have not kept' (as Luther's Catechism says). There is - in the word of God, the Gospel - the Good News - that there is forgiveness of sins, and forgiveness for sinners through Jesus Christ, the Savior.

That message in the word of God is that 'while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'. Now, I can say that I have heard THAT truth from God's word, and, indeed, kept it all these years, and all these years I have been truly blessed as a result.

And the blessing of keeping this word of God, keeping the Gospel, is not a reward for my good work. The blessing for those who hear this word of God is the blessing of a clean conscience, that comes from knowing that all my sins have been atoned for when God's Son, Jesus Christ paid for the guilt of all humanity with His blood - on a cross - and was raised again from the dead for our justification before God.

Another reality for a sixty-year old, is that it is not as easy as it used to be to 'keep' something in my mind from being forgotten.

One of the things I have noticed in 35 years of ministry is that when people stay away from church, the one thing we always forget is the Gospel, the very basis for our salvation. Ask someone about Jesus, who hasn't been to church for years and years, and they will invariably tell you. 'Jesus isn't going to judge me. He knows I've been a good person. True, I don't attend church, but I know in myself, I'm as good as, if not better than most people - and that's all there is to it'.

No, my friend, if you have forgotten that you are unworthy of eternal life without a living connection to the Savior, for the forgiveness of your sins, then you are still in your sins, and no better than the enemies of Jesus in today's Gospel reading.

You are only blessed if you hear the word of God and keep it - not losing its message of Law and Gospel - but rather letting '*the word of God dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God*', the Bible says. (Col. 3.16).

So - never stop reading your Bible and listening to sound teaching. '*Pray without ceasing*'. Never stop attending Divine Services of word and sacrament. Never stop refreshing your soul with the word of God. In that way you will be hear the word of God, and keep it; and in keeping it be immeasurably blest. Amen.

And the peace of God that transcends all human understanding will keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto everlasting life. Amen.