

Sermon for Lent III Oculi – Luke 11:14-28

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Over the first few weeks of Lent we've heard of the Christ's battles with the devil. First, Satan tempted our Lord in the desert by means of bread, power, and Christ's own safety. Just last week Christ cast out a demon from the Canaanite woman's daughter. And today our Lord battles the old evil foe yet again by casting out a demon and telling a parable that foreshadows His great victory over the devil.

Today the Lord cast out a demon from a man who was mute – the man was unable to speak. When the demon went out of the man, then he began to speak. But skeptics in the crowd scoffed, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons." Our Lord suffered many accusations before His crucifixion. It was said that He broke the Sabbath; that He blasphemed, that is, slandered God; that He was a deceiver; these accusations were not unlike those leveled against the prophet Jeremiah, who also was threatened with death. But for Jesus, it was also said that He claimed to be the king of the Jews; that He claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Son of Man; that He misled the Jewish people and forbade them to pay taxes to Caesar; that He created a dangerous situation in which the Romans must intervene and abolish Jewish temple worship. But over and above all these charges, none is as blatantly evil as this one: "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons."

The Lord's response to this accusation is uncharacteristically logical. First, He says no kingdom divided against itself can stand. It's as if Christ said, "Satan is not against Satan. Why would the devil help me or anyone cast out his demons? Second, if such a thing were possible, then it would be the only way to cast out demons. Either no one casts out demons by Beelzebul or everyone casting out demons does so by Beelzebul. Therefore, if you don't take this back, your own sons will accuse you, after all, '... by whom do your sons cast [demons] out?' Beelzebul? If you insist on accusing Me of this, you are also accusing your sons. This ought to convince you of the lunacy of your accusation. The pagan Egyptian magicians could recognize the finger of God in the destructive miracles of Moses. Can you not see that I am casting out demons by the same finger of God, but for healing? The kingdom of God has arrived. I am the King Messiah, and I am here for all who are mute, blind, and deaf. I am here for you. I do not bring you plagues and judgment, as in Egypt. I bring you mercy. I bring you healing."

Following after this dialogue about casting out demons, we then find a peculiar parable told by Christ. It's the foretelling of how He will gain the victory over the devil. "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when One stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, He takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil." To get the full benefit from a parable, we need to figure out what the items and characters in the story represent. In this parable, Satan is the strong man. He guards his palace. He has to guard it because he stole it and he knows that it really doesn't belong to him. Have you ever noticed the irony of how somebody is more protective and afraid of losing something that is not rightfully theirs? So it is with the devil. But along comes the stronger man, who is the Christ, the Son of God in the flesh who takes away the armor in which Satan trusted. The Stronger Man takes the spoils for Himself.

We are the spoils. The broken strong man has that in which he trusted taken away. In what does the devil trust? He trusts the law and justice. He knows that Adam and Eve broke the law in the Garden of Eden. He knows that Cain broke the law in murdering his brother. He knows that every man and woman cannot keep the law. He uses it and continually accuses us with it. Man's breaking of the law unleashed sin, death, and decay into the world. We feel the effects: our memory isn't quite what it used to be. Our bodies get sick, wear out, and die. The strong man, the devil, proves his point again and again that we have not kept the Law and that we deserve death. This strong man was ready for the God of wrath and justice. What he was not ready for was God in the flesh who rules by mercy and sacrifice. The devil is not as strong as God-become-man. Jesus overwhelmed him.

The Stronger Man, Christ, takes away the armor in which the devil trusted. The devil's accusations are silenced. Our sins are no more, because Christ stands in our place! Even death is nothing to fear! One day, when our bodies are laid in a grave, death will not have the last say, because the Stronger Man has conquered death by His own death. The Savior's cross has crushed the skull of the serpent. The war has been won! And the Lord's dead body was resurrected and so we will be resurrected as well!

Next in the Gospel, Christ gives us a brief, but sharp sermon: "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." What does this mean? We should pay close attention to our lives redeemed in God. Have we helped our neighbor? Have we been rich in good works? Have we been generous and ready to share? Or have we lived without the fear of God? Have we slandered and gossiped about our family members or coworkers? Have we lived without repentance, without love, without patience, without godliness? Have we allowed our fortress of prayer to crumble to dust? The Lord said it this way: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." Should this not cause us all the more to repent? Is not our current condition worse than our first?

I believe that I cannot believe. I confess that I cannot confess. I am as mute as a demon-possessed man. Yet the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel—and behold! Gossip, liar, demon cooperator that I am, I believe. I confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, for that has been revealed to me by the Father in heaven in His holy Word. I speak. I have been bought back and redeemed while my accuser stands silent. He still tempts me, to be sure. He seeks to deceive and mislead me. But He is now mute. He has lost his sting. He has lost his victory. I am baptized. I eat Christ's body and drink His blood. I am forgiven. Christ has made His promise to you, you are forgiven, and that promise cannot be broken! Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠

This sermon was largely based upon a sermon preached by the Rev. D. H. Petersen, (pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Ft. Wayne, IN) and can be found in his book Thy Kingdom Come, Emmanuel Press, 2012.