

# ***Deliver us from Evil***

*Second Sunday after Pentecost (OS 12C)*

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## **Sunday, June 12, 2022**

You all know the quote - 'All the devil has to do to succeed is to convince the world that he does not exist'. This is a fair description of our Western world view, where to believe in Evil and evil forces has become unfashionable. Evil does not exist as an entity, but rather bad things are the result of either misfortune or misadventure. Somehow, we have replaced the activity of evil, with a world view that says - Hitler is just the victim of his upbringing - his behaviour can all be accounted for in terms of parental mismanagement.

It is in the attitude to the spiritual realm that there is the sharpest contrast between the Western and Third world understanding of the world. We, in all our sophistication have explained away evil in terms of the material world, and act for the most part as if there is no spiritual realm at all. By contrast, the third world view is that the earth is the battle ground for spiritual forces, good and evil are in constant battle, and humanity, can become part of the collateral damage, as the kingdom of darkness battles the kingdom of light.

Our gospel reading this morning, is a reminder to us that there is more to the world than just the material things that we see, and that our Lord, on many occasions, engaged the battle in the spiritual realms and won. Indeed, in the case of the demonic, our Lord took on the powers of darkness to free the man, who was so tragically enslaved. If we are to believe that Scripture is given to us by the hand of God. It is inspired by the spirit of God, if you like God breathed, then we must assume that that which has been recorded for us in the Gospels, is there for a purpose. In our study of God's word, then, we are charged with the responsibility of finding out the message in the passage. We must resist the temptation, to accept only those parts which conveniently fit our world view and dismiss those which challenge the way we look at the world as either irrelevant or in need of interpretation in the light of modern experience.

Many modern interpreters like to avoid this passage and seek to explain the demoniacs predicament in terms of some type of mental illness. Or perhaps to focus on the parts of the passage that don't presuppose the belief in evil. Yet if we are to be true to the text, we see portrayed Jesus in a power encounter with the forces of evil. We see the Lord challenging the evil that is binding the man, and with his power and authority, freeing him from it.

So what can this story tell us?

To begin with, we must learn to look at things with Spiritual Eyes. The man and the man Jesus were not the encounter as much as was the engagement in the spiritual realm. The demons could recognise the spirit of Jesus and his authority. Indeed, the whole response of the demon who had so much power of the demonic and in the physical world responded: "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me" and they begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter the herd of swine.

The men of village could not subdue the man, but Jesus used the spiritual powers to defeat the demons, and the man was not as much subdued but liberated.

Now this is scary stuff, particularly when we find it difficult to accept the existence of spiritual powers and more so, that their power is nothing against the authority of Jesus. The men of the village were afraid and sought to remove Jesus, lest they themselves were to be drawn to the spiritual battle ground.

But there is another danger for us. In as much as it is easy for us to seek to deny the pressure of evil forces in this world, there is another response that is equally inappropriate. We can seek to see all things in terms of the spiritual battle. Some Christians have responded, seeing everything in terms of evil forces. Actions are interpreted in terms of 'the devil made me do it' rather than recognising the power of human beings to make bad choices. Sin, humanity's choice to disobey God is much a part of the bad things that happen. Seeking to deal with sin, they seek to drive it out evil. A wise saying to remember is that 'you cannot exorcise a sin nor repent of a demon' and it is important to be able to tell the difference. Often, we have seen in the past, misguided actions by some Christian groups seeking to exorcise that which was not evil. Often, the result is catastrophic.

Our reading then is a reminder not to dismiss the possibility of spiritual battles, but it is not a mandate to see everything in those terms. As Christians then, we must live with a sort of Dualism, seeing things both in the physical world and in the spiritual world as well. We need to be aware that "our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Our calling as God People is to stand against these things, with the weapons of Prayer, that we might not be defeated. Jesus' action in Caesarea, shows us that his authority will defeat the forces of evil and liberate the captive. In as much as we wish to proclaim the Gospel we also called to stand against the evil that has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Indeed, there is our calling to both, that we might hasten coming of the kingdom.

Prayer then is our most powerful weapon, but it seems that we are most reluctant to use it. Prayer meetings are the least popular of church events, and prayer seems to be the thing that is given the time left over, rather than the focus of our activity. Our reading this morning should be a call for us return to prayer, to join in the battle to claim our city for Christ from evil forces. Our calling as Christians is to liberate those are held in bondage that they might be able to hear and respond to God's liberating love.

Today, let us renew our commitment to join in this battle. I am not talking here of something major, but a small starting point. Let us begin where we are. Let us look around where we live and pray for our neighbours with the authority of Jesus, that they might be liberated from any evil. Let us begin the process of the proclamation of the Gospel with the weapons of prayer. Let us begin the battle on our knees.

Let us pray.

*Father God, give us a commitment to stand against the forces of darkness with the weapons of prayer. Help us to make time for prayer in our busy lives, and allow us to recognise when evil is attacking us. Deliver us from evil.*

**AMEN**