

There are times, heavenly Father, when we feel the great weight of our sin and fear Your justified anger toward us and the destruction threatened against all who transgress Your holy Law. Open our eyes of faith at such times with the light of Your truth, so that we see clearly that Your great saving acts for us in Your Son were not to destroy us but rather our archenemy who holds the power of death, namely, the devil and all his allies arrayed against us. Let us always acknowledge and trust that Your grace and love are steadfast and unchanging and ever available to us in and through our Savior. Amen.

And [Jesus] went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority. And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. And they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!" And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

In Christ Jesus, whose Word is still spoken among us with all authority and power over our enemies, dear fellow-redeemed:

About two weeks ago The Gilmour Academy girls' varsity basketball team defeated Northeast Ohio Prep, 108-1! And even though the victorious coach said he did all he could to prevent running up the score, like substituting freshmen early on, their overwhelming superiority was evident even by halftime when the score was 72-1. Can you imagine what the next opponent of those victors thought before their game? *Did they come to destroy us too?*

The demon in our text, who possessed that man, knew Jesus well, identifying Him as the Holy One of God. He also knew the power Jesus had over him and his fellow demons with their limited powers in both the spiritual and physical realms. Impotently he challenges Jesus' intent by saying: "Have you come to destroy us? *ya Bully!*"

We actually can identify with this fearful thought in regard to ourselves, my fellow sinners, just like believers in the past. Remember the people asking Moses to cover his face which reflected the glory of God having come down from Mt. Sinai and speaking with God? Remember the three disciples on the Mt. of Transfiguration when they were surrounded by the bright cloud and

heard the voice of the Father. So we too at times, confronted with our unworthiness as sinners respond to our Lord by asking: **Has the Holy One of God Come to Destroy Us?**

I

The devil wants us to conclude such a thing when we especially experience difficulties in this life, questioning the love of God by thinking He is purposely plaguing us with the intent to destroy us. But before we consider how it is that God is for us, not against us, we do have to acknowledge that there is something in us that our Lord does destroy, namely our old sinful natures.

It is not a pleasant experience and frankly it is a daily struggle, which becomes wearisome. Paul writing to the Colossians says this: “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

God the Holy Spirit works in us that activity starting at our baptism. *(Luther retained the exorcism in the rite of holy baptism. It got dropped somewhere among Lutherans, perhaps in the 20th Century, it just seemed too difficult to imagine that cute little babies needed to be exorcised.)* Our sinful natures died and were buried with Jesus. As a result we consider ourselves dead to sin. We desire to present all our members, e.g., our hands, mouth and minds as instruments not for unrighteousness, but for righteousness. So as Luther instructs us we daily drown our old Adam with all its sins and evil lusts through contrition and repentance. That is destruction, unpleasant to be sure.

Jesus did come, rightly understood, to destroy us, that is, our old sinful flesh. It is this, which separates us from the Holy God. You will hear from unbelievers and even sadly from us as Christians at times, that God has to accept us for the sinners that we are. Or you will hear that Jesus came to tell us that God has nothing against us. Oh, those thoughts and expressions are so very blasphemous. God has everything against us – look at the Holy One of God upon that cross – God had everything against our holy Substitute. The Father threw His eternal anger upon His Son for our sin.

You and I in that sense need destruction and we do not particularly like it. It is painful and shameful to admit, but there is no other way. Another expression that gets some play in our Christian

circles is this one: *"God hates sin, but loves the sinner."* That is open for great misunderstanding. God Himself says in Malachi and the Apostle repeats in Romans: *"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* It is true God loves all people in His Son, who suffered and died in the place of all people. But the sinner who rejects this magnificent gift of God and desires to answer for his or her own sin, stands alone with that sin and the hatred of God upon him or her for all eternity.

II

But as you thankfully know full well, Jesus did not come to destroy you completely, as He came to destroy the devil and all his demons. Remember hell was not made for human beings but for the devil and his angels. We read in Hebrews about the coming of the Holy One of God: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the One who has the power of death, that is, the devil and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." We read also these refreshing words after John 3:16 "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."

Now the people in our text who witnessed this exchange between the demon and Jesus, and how Jesus with this simple command: "Be silent and come out of him!" were amazed at His authoritative and powerful Word. But lest you think we are at a disadvantage today because our Lord is not visibly and audibly present among us, know that His same powerful Word speaks deliverance for us from the powers of sin, death and hell today.

Every time you hear *"I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and Holy Spirit."* Satan is driven out and his buddy the old Adam is drowned, and a new man of faith arises to a life of righteousness. Every time you hear *"Your sins are all forgiven."* Satan is told to be silent, his lies about your condemnation are eternally rejected. And your sins, everyone of them, are removed from you as far as the east is from the west. Every time you hear *"This is My body... this is My blood."* a poisonous food for the sinful flesh has been prepared and at the same time a life-giving meal has been set before you.

Satan's kingdom is doomed. Christ Jesus has made sure of this. His gracious working through that Word of deliverance is still active in your lives, my fellow Christians. The Holy One of God has come to destroy AND give life. Let Him come to you often in Word and Sacrament, commanding Satan to be silent and to leave you alone. Truly, blessed are you who hear the word of God and keep it!

What happened in that first Century synagogue in our text is not so peculiar and distant as it may seem to us today. Trust well in the power of God at work in your life, as a result you will experience the same response as it received then “reports about *Jesus* went out into every place in the surrounding region.” Who among your friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors do not need this same powerful Lord active with His word in their lives. Invite them to hear Him with the same joy and zeal that motivates any bit of good news which passes from your lips to those same people. Your Lord does not desire to destroy them either, but to give them the same everlasting life you too now possess in Christ Jesus. Amen.