

In Jesus' name. Amen.

People Loved by God,

What happens **when a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace?**

Jesus tells us, "**his goods are safe.**" Luke 11:21

In the appointed Gospel for Lent 3, Jesus compared the devil to that strong man guarding his palace.

3 times in John's Gospel, Jesus called the devil the "**ruler of this world**" (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11)

or the "**prince of this world**" in the words of the King James Version.

I appreciate that idea of translating the devil as the "**prince**" rather than the "**ruler**"

because it implies what we know is the truth, that there is someone greater and in higher authority.

While the devil is the strong man, Jesus is the "**stronger than he**" who "**attacks and overcomes him,**"

which comes out very clearly in the text for our meditation today, from the 4th chapter of St. Luke, ...

*As follows in Jesus' name:*

And He 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. (ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

So many things about this brief text.

In the synagogue on that Sabbath day, in their equivalent to our Sunday church service, there was a man with an unclean spirit.

Now, we don't know if that demon was making himself known in the man up until this time,

if he was causing disruption, or if the people recognized that there was something unusual going on.

But realize that the demons are not afraid to be in our midst, to infiltrate and divide us, if possible.

"Divide and conquer" is a strategy as old as the first temptation in the Garden of Eden.

If possible, the demons like to lull us into a false sense of security to catch us unaware.

So don't think that you can let down your guard against the devil's attacks, even in the church.

...

Isn't it also interesting that the demon recognized who Jesus was and acknowledged it out loud?

Doesn't it remind you of the last day when **every knee should bow... and every tongue confess...**

**that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** Philippians 2:10-11

As **every knee** and **tongue** will be made to acknowledge it,

so even those who rejected Him and were His bitter enemies will not be able to help themselves...

And so we see that even now in the text, the demon couldn't help it.

... Notice, too, that Jesus does not permit the demon to continue speaking,

that He won't allow the demon's testimony to persuade the people of His true identity.

You can understand why this would be, can't you?

While we might be tempted to let the demon keep on speaking about Him,  
the problem is, then, that we would give credence to the rest of what the demons would say.  
Sure, they might say something that is true, but not out of any goodness of their nature.  
Didn't we hear just 2 weeks ago during Jesus' temptation in the wilderness by the devil himself,  
how the devil used God's Word to tempt Jesus.  
The evil angels are cunning and deceptive, they also know God's Word.  
Therefore Jesus will not accept this demon's confession, nor subject the people to it.  
He treats this demon, as he in fact is, a hostile enemy, and shuts it up and expels it from the man.

But at the risk of sounding hypocritical:

Consider what the demon said, and what the Holy Spirit wanted you to hear from this encounter  
when He inspired St. Luke to record this interaction:

**"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."**

The demon acknowledged Jesus' power and authority over them, and power to destroy them, if desired.

At another time, when Jesus encountered the demons named "Legion," they spoke similarly, Matthew 8:29

**"What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"**

Do you notice something about both of these encounters?

Even while acknowledging His power over them to destroy and torment them, how defiant are they?

They are not pleading for His mercy, or humbly groveling before Him.

Their initial questions tell us a lot: **What have You to do with us?**

In other words, "Don't bother us, go away."

And yet, Jesus does not give any heed to them.

He remains; they must depart... and not only from His presence, but also from their captive.

Jesus did not permit the demon to possess the man any longer.

St. Luke reports: **Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out of Him!"**

With these two simple instructions, the demon must comply immediately.

It was obviously against the demon's will.

We see that in how the demon leaves the man, **throwing him down in their midst as he came out.**

And St. Luke records one other element, which makes me wonder if this was uncommon for exorcisms,  
that the demon **came out of him, having done him no harm.**

While showing his power over the man, causing him to be thrown down,  
yet, he must abide,

not only by Jesus' word to come out,

but also by His implication, not to harm him, either.

Doesn't Jesus make it all look so easy? He just speaks a word and the demon does it.

Hearing such things can tempt us to pride, as if you have this same power and authority of your own.  
But if even a loving parent's words alone have no intrinsic power to change the heart of a defiant child,  
then what chance do you have against the forces of pure evil.

Consider also the sobering account of the 7 sons of Sceva spoken of in Acts 19.

They were Jewish exorcists in Ephesus who tried to cast out a demon **saying,**

**"I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." ...**

**But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"**

**And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.** Acts 19:13, 15-16

When these unbelieving exorcists tried to use Jesus' name, the demons did not fear them in the least. We humans are no match for the devil and his minions, as Luther's hymn so poetically puts it in "A Mighty Fortress", **on earth is not his equal.** ELH #250:1

But this does not mean that we are defenseless and powerless against the devil and his attacks.

The "**stronger One than he**" is with you, and He has fought and still fights for you.

When Jesus hung His head in death on that cross,

He stripped the devil of the armor in which he trusted and He has divided the spoil.

That spoil, that treasure Jesus came to take, is you.

He disarmed the devil when He hung on the cross, bearing all of Satan's true accusations against you.

Up until then, Satan (which means "accuser") stood as your accuser before God's heavenly throne.

But once Jesus' died with all *your sins and evil lusts* nailed to Him, those accusations were answered, paid in full.

Consider then also the hearers of Jesus' word that day,

The people **were astonished at His teaching**, at His doctrine, St. Luke reports. Matthew 7:29; Mark 1:22

They were attentive as they discerned that what He said was not like that **of the scribes.**

**for His word possessed authority.** He knew that of which He taught.

They recognized that they could trust these words, which aligned with those of the OT prophets from whose texts Jesus would have preached from in the synagogue on that Sabbath.

People loved by God, you have this same authoritative Word.

It is not your word, but it is God's Word, and carries with it the authority and power of God.

Didn't the Father create the heavens and the earth by this Word?

Didn't the Son use it to save this demon-possessed man and to save those hearers who believed it?

Doesn't the Holy Spirit use this Word to give and preserve and strengthen faith?

... even connecting it to simple water to wash away sins and pour out Christ's righteousness?

... even joining it to plain bread and wine to comfort troubled consciences and embolden faith?

The Word of God is not some flimsy cardboard sword you make for your children.

God's Word is **living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword,**

**piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow,**

**and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.** Hebrews 4:12

This is what **astonished** and **amazed** those who listened to Jesus preach.

They could recognize it as **the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.** Romans 1:16

And, that day, they saw that even the demons must submit to it.

While the devil is still the **prince of this world**, and while he is still more powerful than you,

God has given you this **sword of the Spirit** by which He defends you from the attacks of the devil.

Learning to wield this powerful weapon is the joy of the Christian,

not because it gives you power over the devil, but because it gives you Christ, the **stronger than he**, it delivers to you a clean conscience before God and grants you peace and comfort in God's presence.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.** *Soli Deo Gloria*