

✠ Luke 8:26-39 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Now here is a marvel to our modern, scientifically oriented minds. A man was demon possessed. A man exercised the demons. The demons flew into a herd of pigs and drove the pigs over a steep embankment into the sea, and the pigs drowned. Later, a pixy, named Tinkerbelle, led a boy named Aladdin who had a magic lamp to a magical kingdom where three fairy godmothers cared for a princess who pricked her finger upon the spindle of a spinning wheel and the only thing that would save her was love's first kiss, whereupon the Beast turned back into the prince and Belle finally returned from the Rabbit Hole leaving the Queen of Hearts to ponder her house of gingerbread.

Ah, yes; the fairytale. But this is not a fairytale. There was indeed a man who was possessed by real demons. A real man really did cast them out. And demon-possessed pigs really did die a watery death; the Virgin really did conceive.

Madame Reason, who first reared her meddling head when Eve first bit the forbidden fruit, rears her head again here, trying to convince the Church that this cannot really be believed and that demons don't actually exist. The soothing, succulent voice of Madame Reason echoes throughout the mind of so-called modern man: "No one is possessed by demons; they are merely mentally ill or schizophrenic or have some other personality or brain disorder. No one, save for the occasional Hollywood character on the silver screen, actually exercises these non-extant demons. Only characters of fiction like Gandolf the White and Anakin Skywalker possess power over the elements and supernatural influence over others."

But it is not so surprising that Madam Reason wants us to doubt this story's truth, or any of our Lord's miracles for that matter. For she, in fact, would have you believe that this Jesus of the Bible is a fictional character. Oh sure, the man Jesus of Nazareth may have been real enough, too many scientists, archeologists, and historians attest to that, but the Jesus of the Bible – the One who cast out demons, walked on water, fed the five thousand, and rose from the dead – that Jesus is certainly fictional not unlike Hercules, Pandora, Poseidon, the Golly Green Giant, the Abominable Snowman, and the Fairy Godmother.

But Madam Reason doesn't stop there. Oh no. Once you've bitten the forbidden fruit, doubting Holy Scripture, Madam Reason plays a real number on you. You begin to doubt whether Baptism is God's work or your work, doubting its efficacy unto salvation. You begin to doubt whether the bread and wine are the Body and Blood of Christ, and so you begin to doubt that the Lord's Supper actually forgives sins and bestows life, and chalking it all up to an emotionally charged memorial meal that only has meaning if you attach meaning to it. You begin to doubt whether or not the Word of God really does have the power to bring a sinner to repentance or to grant life to the repentant sinner. And so you are left to depend upon yourself and your righteousness, piety, and faith instead of depending upon Jesus' words and promises.

Finally you are left holding onto a powerless cross and a hollow resurrection as Madame

Reason convinces you that if your soul really needs saving then you had better step up to the plate and get busy saving it. For the food of her table does not forgive sins, it convinces you that you are not a sinner.

Once you've bought into the lie that begins with, "Did God really say?" that is, did Jesus really cast out demons? Did He really change water into wine? Was He really born of the Virgin Mary? Did Jesus really raise Lazarus, walk on water, and find money in the mouth of a fish? Did Jesus really rise from the dead, or is this all an elaborate myth and fanciful fairytale?

Once that forbidden fruit passes your lips and fills your belly then you too stand before the Lord of Glory as one who is possessed by demons. Or don't you know that the devil *began* with convincing the children of God that God's Word was not reliable. So he continues this day, going about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And who is it that a lion devours? The man with a weapon and the know-how to use it? No, the lion devours the one who is defenseless and unaware of his surroundings.

It is easy to take this text and throw it in that ever-ready, easy-bake oven of Christian psychology and Christian self-help books that sound something like this: You poor thing, you've been possessed by the demons of self-doubt, by the demons of poor self-esteem. But you can break those chains and cast those demons out by listening to God or at least some pop-Christian psycho-preacher who will give the final twelve steps to attain any freedom you want. Don't you know that God wants you to have a better life? He wants you to have better relationships and more successful careers. Don't you know that God's already taken care of sin? So stop thinking like a medieval monk, dwelling on sin and salvation, and start living your best life NOW!¹

This way of thinking allows you the freedom to neither affirm nor deny whether or not this story, or any part of Scripture, is real. It doesn't have to be true; it's meaning is true and that's what really matters. That is how Rick Warren sold a million or so copies of his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, to Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Hindus. The meaning is universalized and can be applied to all, no matter your personal beliefs and ideas or gods.

In the end of Madame Reason's fairytale, it's up to you. You decide what God's purpose is for you, or at least you decide how God's purpose for you is going to affect your life or not affect your life. You're in control, all you have to do is acknowledge that God, whoever he, she, or it is, made you the pilot and you can fly anywhere your little heart will take you.

Repent. How often we fall into the post-modern mindset that says, "Oh sure, Christianity is real enough, but what makes it really real is what I do with it." And, like your first mother in the Garden, the forbidden fruit is pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom, and so you bite. And thus begins the big ball of relativism rolling down the hill of self-this and self-that. Such wisdom is folly and such understanding is useless.

It is the wisdom that boasts that every altar is equally valid and every religion will finally get you to heaven. Whether that heaven is Valhalla or Nirvana, or whether seventy virgins await your arrival or that you will actually become a god, or whether heaven is just you sitting around feeling really good about yourself. No one person's religion is more valid than another's just as no one opinion can hold sway over another. In the end, all opinions are right, all religions are equal, and all people are basically good.

¹ Reference to Joel Olsteen's best selling self-help book.

Those who think that way are not in their right mind. They are truly seized by demons. They are God-haters, slanderers, insolent and haughty, boastful, and inventors of evil (cf. Romans 1:30-31). The demons drive them out into the desert where there is no water of life nor bread from heaven. There they perish, thrashing about like wild animals and despised by their neighbors and friends, all the while thinking that they can help themselves by doing these twelve steps or reading this self-help book, or listening to that preacher on the radio because he always tells me what I need to hear. Itching ears are scratched by the devil's nails.

Repent. For there is no such thing as self-help. After all, how can one who is steeped in sin and has a heart of coal help him or herself out of such a state? How can a dead man raise himself? How can one who is possessed by demons cast them out of himself? No, salvation comes from outside, it comes from the lips of Jesus. Self-help is the oldest lie told. In it are the two biggest most harmful heresies ever to plague the Church of God from Adam and Eve all the way down to Concordia Lutheran Church: the denial of original sin – that you're not really damned at conception so there is hope for you in yourself – and the affirmation of free will – that you can choose to have your demons exercised and choose your own master.

Rather, as St. Paul tells us, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned by sin and death (Galatians 3:23; Romans 8:2). In sin your will is not your own, but is held captive by the Law that condemns you in your sinful nature.

But thanks be to God for He sent forth His Son, born of the Blessed Virgin, born under the Law to free those under the Law, to cast from you the demons of doubt and unbelief, the demons of self-reliance and self-salvation. The demons that held you captive in your sins that bound you to death and hell. Thanks be to God that He has sent the flood waters of Baptism over your head, drowning the unclean swine and dressing your shamefully naked soul with His robes of righteousness.

The coming faith has been revealed and now you sit at the feet of Jesus in your right mind, listening to His words of life and being fed from His own hand. The fairytale has proved to be true, as God has sent upon you His Spirit by whom you cry out, "Our Father." So now you are no longer a slave to the demons but free in Christ Jesus. Free to be holy and righteous in His sight all the days of your lives.

You still have money problems, you still have car trouble, you still have children to raise, you're still grossly behind in your work, you still battle sickness and disease, and you still face the death of loved ones and your own demise. But those are not demons; those are the trials and crosses of the faithful whereby God forces you to depend solely upon Him in Christ Jesus. For Jesus has not come to set you free from the occupations and necessities of this life, but rather He came to set you free from sin and death, hell and damnation.

Jesus knows you are weak and easily fall into temptation. That is why He died and rose again, so that you will not be damned by your sins. That is why He has given you the gift of Baptism that clothes you in Him and brings you into the ark of salvation, His Church. That is why He feeds you His healing and sinless flesh and blood of righteousness; so that you will live life in Him and His Father be your Father.

What more is there to do but to go about telling everyone the wonderful things that Jesus has done for you? Come, sit at the feet of Jesus and be healed of your sins and guilt and be raised to life everlasting.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.
✠ AMEN ✠