

Third Sunday in Lent

February 27, 2005

Luke 11:14-28

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

Jesus Invades the Devil's Home

1. Foolish Unbelief
2. Impossible Neutrality
3. Blessed Devotion to the Word

*^{NIV} **Luke 11:14** Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. ¹⁵ But some of them said, "By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." ¹⁶ Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. ¹⁷ Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. ¹⁸ If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. ¹⁹ Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. ²¹ "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²² But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils. ²³ "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters. ²⁴ "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' ²⁵ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first." ²⁷ As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." ²⁸ He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

About a year ago, residents of some parts of Stanislaus County were living in fear. A rash of so-called "home invasion" robberies had many people on edge. The robbers were forcing their way into people's homes, often rural homes and often at night. After terrorizing the residents with guns or threats of violence, they would begin to help themselves to the possessions of the home-owner. The crimes soon became a priority for the sheriff's department. Frightened residents installed security systems and bought guns and watchdogs. Finally, there was a

sense of relief in the community when it was reported that the gang of home invaders had been arrested.

I think we've all delighted in the image of our Savior as the Good Shepherd, who gently leads his flock and carries the young next to his heart. The image of Jesus blessing little children is another favorite. And, of course, we treasure the image of a Savior who shouldered the cross for us and offered himself on that cross to be pierced for our transgressions.

But have you ever thought of Jesus as a home invader? I doubt it! But that is how Jesus describes himself here in Luke 14 when he says, "*When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.*" In this analogy, it's Jesus who invades the devil's home. He overpowers the devil and helps himself to the devil's possessions. That's essentially what we see happening here in today's Gospel lesson. Jesus is deep in territory occupied by the devil when he encounters a man who had been rendered mute by demonic possession. At a word from Jesus the demon is driven out and the man, who had been one of Satan's spoils, is released. But not all who saw what Jesus had done regard it as an indication that Jesus was invading the devil's home or that this is an indication of the coming of God's kingdom. So for a few minutes this morning let's explore the three different reactions as Jesus takes on the devil. There is 1] foolish unbelief, then also 2] impossible neutrality, and 3] finally, blessed devotion to the Word.

1. Foolish Unbelief

Luke tells us here, "*Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute.*" Exorcisms didn't always work. Just a couple chapters earlier in Luke's Gospel, a man with a demon-possessed child comes to Jesus and says, "**I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.**" (9:40) In Acts 19 there's an incident where some Jewish exorcists took on an evil spirit. But when they addressed the demon, he replied, "**Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?**" The demon then proceeded to overpower them and give them such a beating that they ran away.

But Jesus never failed at an exorcism. The demons did know him and they were terrified of him. That was the case with this demon who had robbed this poor man of his ability to speak. At Jesus' command, the demon leaves, the man who had been released speaks, and the crowd is amazed. What comes next? You would think that when Jesus performs such a powerful sign and puts a demon to flight the universal reaction would be to acknowledge that God's reign has come. After all, Jesus had just done what the prophet Isaiah predicted would happen when the Messiah comes: "**Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and**

the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.” (Is. 35:5-6)

But instead of cries of, “We have found the Messiah,” what Jesus hears instead is an expression of foolish unbelief: *“By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.”* Rather than acknowledging the obvious and admitting that Jesus is here invading the devil’s home, his enemies accuse Jesus of having a demon himself. They charge that what the crowd has just witnessed is not really an exorcism, but just Beelzebub redeploying one of his demons.

It’s a foolish charge. Jesus shows just how foolish: *“Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub.”* If the devil’s kingdom is engaged in a civil war—one demon against his fellow demon—then Satan’s kingdom can’t stand anyway. It’s foolish to assert such a thing!

It’s foolish for another reason. Jesus says, *“Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out?”* Jesus wasn’t alone in performing exorcisms. As mentioned earlier, there were also Jewish exorcists. How does it make sense to charge Jesus with being in league with Satan when he’s doing the same thing that the followers of these Jewish religious leaders were doing? What makes much more sense is the conclusion that Jesus offers: *“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”* Here’s the proper conclusion: The Messiah has come. God’s reign has commenced.

I find this image of Jesus as the invader of the devil’s home fully as comforting as the image of him as Good Shepherd or as the gentle Savior who blesses little children. This world was in the grip of the evil one. I was in the grip of the evil one. I was—as you were—conceived and born in sin. Without Christ’s invasion of this fallen world, we would have been lost forever. And you can trace that back to the success the devil had in the Garden of Eden. Sin and death were in our DNA. That’s why Jesus came to do battle with Satan for our souls. Make no mistake: Jesus at his coming into our world was coming into hostile territory—like Baghdad at its most hostile. Enemies at every turn, subtle plots and open confrontations; demonic versions of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs); Satan madly seeking to resist Jesus’ efforts at rescuing us. But in the end, Jesus overpowered him and won the victory. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, Jesus was impervious to the devil’s temptations. By his death, Jesus paid the penalty for sin that we should have paid and in so doing set us free. Joined in baptism to Christ’s victory over sin and Satan, we share in Christ’s victory over the devil. Satan has been crushed, just as God promised.

Jesus doesn't always encounter the kind of outspoken opposition to his saving work that brands him a devil. Sometimes the reaction to his work appears to be a sort of neutrality—neither openly opposing Jesus nor wholeheartedly embracing of him. Is such neutrality possible?

2. Impossible Neutrality

Jesus says, *"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters."*

When I think of neutrality, I think of Switzerland. In World War II, the Swiss sided with neither the Axis nor the Allies. By their neutrality, they managed to avoid having the bloodshed and destruction of that great conflict spread to their country. And I've admired the Swiss for their efforts at not being involved in war. But I suppose that if I had been French or Polish, I might not have appreciated the Swiss failure to get involved when my country was being overrun by Nazis.

Some people try to adopt a neutral stance with regard to Jesus. Who is Jesus? They don't call him a devil, but they don't call him Lord either. They try not to take sides. But when it comes to Jesus, neutrality isn't possible. Either you trust him as your Lord and he reigns in your heart, or you don't trust him and you still live in the enemy camp. There's no middle ground.

Jesus must have said this initially for the benefit of the man who'd been cleansed of the demon. The demon was gone; who would live in him now? Would it be Jesus, or did he want some time to think about it? Jesus goes on to point out that neutrality is not just impossible, but it's dangerous when it's attempted.

"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first."

There is a void, a hollow place, in each of us as we are by nature. It's not a question of whether we'll fill that void, but what we'll fill it with. As Jesus points out here, the devil loves a vacuum. He'd love to fill that vacuum himself—or to get us to fill it with all manner of excesses: too much drink, too much food, too much work, too much pursuit of pleasure. What the Bible encourages instead is that we be filled with the Spirit. The Spirit **"strengthens us with power in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith,"** Paul tells the Ephesians (3:16-17). Later in the same letter he says, **"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."** And then he tells us how to be filled with the Spirit: **"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make**

music in your heart to the Lord.” (5:18-19) When it's the Spirit who's filling our hearts, when Spirit has caused our Savior, Jesus, to dwell in our hearts, then there's no room for Satan to come in and that impossible neutrality won't be a concern for us.

3. Blessed Devotion to the Word

Now there was at least one person in the crowd who wasn't afraid to speak up for Jesus. As Luke so often brings out in his Gospel, it was a woman. She had been listening to what Jesus was saying and she was moved to call out, *“Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.”* Now that was a nice thing to say about Jesus. It's similar to what Elizabeth said to Mary when Mary came to visit after she learned she was going to be the mother of the Lord. Elizabeth said to Mary, **“Blessed are you among women!”** (Luke 1:42) And it's true: Mary was greatly blessed to have been the mother of our Savior. But Jesus uses that exclamation to put an exclamation point on what he's been saying here. He says, *“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”*

Why had Jesus done the exorcism described here? It wasn't just that he had a taste for fighting the devil. He had come to rescue us and that inevitably involved taking on the devil. But whenever Jesus performed a miracle, he wanted it to serve as the impetus for getting people to listen to his Word. Finally, the question here isn't about who is stronger—Jesus or the devil—but is what Jesus says about himself true? Does his driving out demons prove that the kingdom of God has come? Is he the Christ, our Savior? If he is, then the works I've witnessed will cause me to want to hear and obey his Word. If the flight of the demons means that my Savior has appeared on the scene, then how blessed we are to be able to hear his Word. That's finally the reaction Jesus is looking for: not the dangerous and ultimately impossible neutrality, still less the foolish unbelief, but a heart that believes there are blessings in devoting myself to the hearing and keeping of God's Word.

It's so that we could hear his Word and be saved through faith in him that Jesus invaded the devil's home. Amen.