



“Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Saturday and Sunday, January 27 - 28, 2018

All Services

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111;
1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Well this has been an interesting week in the news there's been a lot of big fights going on. You probably saw them in the newspaper or on TV, of course earlier in the week there was the government shutdown wondering whether or not people were going to get paid. Then of course there are old fights that continue to be big fights, North Korea and the United States, Palestinians and the Israelies, and then unfortunately a couple days ago a large bomb went off that was sponsored by the Taliban to kill moderate Afghans. And then next Sunday is the Super Bowl with the Eagles vs. the Patriots. Big great fights.

But it would be wrong for us to think that the big fights only happen in those larger venues in government or courts or industry or politics or professional sports. The really great struggles happen very near to us where we see right vs. wrong, good vs. evil, life and death. They are incredibly near to us; the single mom in our community trying to create a stable home environment for her children struggling to make ends meet, that is a big struggle. Or the man dealing with an opioid addiction numbing his life trying to take away that which pains him physically and emotionally. Or the teen in the local school who is being bullied wondering if there is anybody at all in the whole wide world that cares for him, or the child suffering from cancer so young to be dealing with such adult concerns.

In our gospel reading Jesus encounters the man with an unclean spirit. Earlier Satan had attacked him and now Jesus fights back. The confrontation takes place in a synagogue, a place where the ritually clean gather for worship, but there is an unclean spirit in this place of ritual purity and it must be driven out by someone with spiritual power to defeat the evil one whose only aim is to lie and confuse and deceive.

Of course, this is also a warning for the church, the devil is quite at home in places of worship. C.S. Lewis in his book *The Screwtape Letters* shares correspondence between Screwtape, an experienced tempter who guides a less experienced tempter, Wormwood, in his effort to draw his assigned "patient" away from God. When his patient joins a church, Screwtape tells Wormwood to not worry about that and he advises his younger devil to urge the man to be a "critic" when God wants him to be a

“pupil.” Screwtape says, *“It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out”*

When Linda and I were serving in New York we went to a Christmas party sponsored by one of our friends. There were a lot of couples there from the local school where all of our kids went. There was one couple in particular, Dan and Patty, we had had good conversations with them before, but at this party something was just different. Patty was very standoffish when we were all gathered together having conversation she would just kind of slip away. And then I would notice when we were in one of the larger rooms of the house I would notice her kind of glancing and glancing away from us. I later found out from Dan a couple of months later that Patty was having an affair and they were separating. You see everybody at the party knew that I was the local pastor and I wonder if she was just avoiding me.

In the synagogue the unclean spirit recognizes Jesus and yells at him, “What have you to do with us?” and Jesus responds with a very simple and strong message, now I am paraphrasing here, but it's *“Shut up and get out!”* Jesus muzzles the demon and frees the man. God is able and to deliver us from our demons, our unclean spirits whatever keeps us in bondage and keeps us far away from God.

And so, what are you struggling with? What have been your demons? Maybe it's anger or distrust, or addiction, or loneliness. Perhaps it's racism or betrayal or pride or intolerance, or maybe greed or guilt or cynicism. The way our demons are cast out is to tell them to shut up and to get out. Jesus is among us in his church and when you and I join with him in worship and service he is willing to demonstrate his power among us. He brings holy authority to the problems in our life and when we trust Jesus the power of evil is shown the door.

For the people of Jesus' day, they recognize that in his teaching something new was being proclaimed. It was not like the scribes of Jesus' day, the traditionalist who knew all about Jewish teaching, ritual, and custom. Jesus offers something new, a vibrant faith that liberates the man with the unclean spirit and liberates us to seize our God-directed destiny. Jesus gives us a future and a hope and that is certainly something for us to sing about.

In the psalm that we sang today, 2500 years ago the psalmist declared those words. The Jewish people had been liberated from slavery in Babylon and now they had returned home to Jerusalem, but it was in a terrible state of disrepair. Their cherished sanctuary was in ruins. They could have looked and said “Oh, how are we going to bring this back to the way it was, how will all this work be done?” But instead the psalmist offers a psalm of praise, “Praise the Lord he says, I will give thanks to God with my whole heart in the assembly of the congregation, great are your works oh God.” The psalmist is celebrating God's saving act and the peoples journey from bondage to freedom from despair to hope, from longing for the past to a future that God intends for them. God can be trusted to save and inspire us like the psalmist sings. Singing our great redeemers praise, giving him thanks for all that he has done and remembering, remembering the one who came and lived among us offering healing and hope, and

who continues to be with his holy people, *Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing our great Redeemers praise.* Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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