

The Destroyer
Luke 8:26-39

The human will to live is a very powerful force. There are many epic tales of people battling to stay alive. For World War II, the Japanese military trained some of their pilots overcome their will to live. They were instructed to intentionally crash their planes into targets to destroy them.

In the book *Hell from the Heavens* the author tells the story of the largest single-ship kamikaze attack of World War II. The date was April 16, 1945. The battle was Okinawa. The target was the USS Laffey. It was a destroyer class ship and had already faced battle three times. But nothing like this day. During the eighty-minute onslaught the Laffey was hit by twenty-two kamikazes. And yet, while they sustained significant damage, they were not destroyed. It was an epic battle.

Luke sets the scene for an epic battle. The disciples had just faced a fierce windstorm on the Sea of Galilee. Luke describes the raging waves filling the boat with water. Somehow, Jesus is able to sleep in these conditions. The disciples *woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing. And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was calm.* Until they reached the shore. There another battle began to brew.

When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. This guy was in rough

shape. He was a “streaker” who hung out with skeletons; he didn’t wear clothes and he lived among the tombs. People had attempted to keep him locked up, but he repeatedly broke free. A crazy man; a strong man. And as Jesus and the disciples haul the boat up on shore, Jesus and His disciples comes face-to-face with this deranged demoniac. They go from one scary situation to another.

They are confronted with “Legion.” Luke tells us this is what he is called because *many demons had entered him.* A Roman legion was a unit of about six thousand soldiers.

But while Jesus is outnumbered, He is not outmatched. If we watch the words, we quickly see who is in control of the battle. It’s Jesus. The demons beg Jesus not to bind them to the abyss, which is the eternal destination of the damned. You don’t beg if you’re in control; you beg if you’re being controlled. They beg Jesus to go easy on them, to send them into a herd of pigs—which Jesus does. And what happens? Luke records: *[T]he herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.* They were sunk. What the kamikazes were unable to do to the USS Laffey, the demons did to the pigs. They went down and met their watery grave.

But the story isn’t over. What happens with the man who had been possessed? He was freed. He is *sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.* It is the posture of a disciple. In Jewish culture, to sit at someone’s feet was to become a disciple of the rabbi. This man is ready to stay with Jesus. He *begged that he might be with him.*

There's that language again, recognizing that Jesus is in control. What does Jesus say? *Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.* In other words, "Share your story." The man wants to be a student, but Jesus calls him to be a storyteller. "Go and tell those who knew what you used to be like how much I've done for you. Tell them the story of the 'hell' that you went through. Tell them of the One who delivered you from the destroyer."

The man's story is one of warfare. The Bible speaks in Ephesians of our struggle *against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* (6:12). The devil is a destroyer. John 10:10 says that he's come to *kill and destroy*. Rev 9:11 calls him the *angel of the bottomless pit*—the abyss—and *Apollyon*, which translates as "the destroyer."

Satan and his minions have one goal: to destroy. Just think of what they destroyed in this man. They destroyed his dignity—naked and living among the dead. They destroyed his relationships—separated from his community, living alone. And when cast out into the herd of pigs, what did the demons do? They destroyed them.

And to this day, we see Satan's destructive forces at work in the lives of people, in our own lives. Destroying marriages, destroying relationships, destroying livelihoods, destroying the lives of the unborn, destroying churches, destroying the mental health of individuals. It's one assault after another. Verse 29 says that *for many a time it [the evil spirit] had seized him*. Many a time. One

after another, to the point of exhaustion. Sometimes our lives may feel like the USS Laffey as we endure one attack after another, trying to sink us.

Are there demons lurking out there, somewhere, waiting to destroy us? If you believe the writings of C. S. Lewis, they aren't out there somewhere. They are right with us here this morning trying to distract you from hearing about Jesus. They are singing a lullaby to get you to fall asleep. They are whispering in your ear about all the other things you have planned for the rest of the day. They are trying to get you to think about anything other than Jesus and what He has done for you.

If you believe the Bible, yes there is a spiritual battle being waged over you. Demon possession like that in our text is rather rare. But all too often they do cause people distress and urge them to do destructive things. Even non-Christians sometime use the language of "fighting their demons" when talking about people in the grip of drug abuse or alcohol addiction or caught up in destructive lusts of the flesh that inflict pain not only on them but on others around them. And whether these forces are chemical or psychological, there can be little doubt that they are things Satan delights in using against us.

What do we do when we find ourselves being tempted? We cling to the Gospel. And the Gospel proclaims this: "[Jesus came] to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). While Satan claims to be the destroyer, the Gospel

proclaims that Satan, the destroyer, has been disarmed at the cross and will one day be completely destroyed.

The apostle Paul says in Colossians 2:15 that Jesus has disarmed the powers of evil, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. And so we cling to Jesus, knowing that by His death and resurrection He has destroyed Satan's power and will deliver us from the destruction that the devil desires to inflict upon us.

We can cling to Jesus in two places. One is in our baptism. I learned something this week. In the Altar Book is an alternate form of the Baptism service, based on Martin Luther's Baptism rite. It uses exorcism type language: "Depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

I would not say that the pigs in our reading were baptized, but what happens to them? They rushed into the water and were drowned. There is similar language in the Small Catechism regarding what baptism signifies: "It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires."

Remembering each day our baptism with the sign of the cross in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit declares to the demons that they now have no power over us. We belong to our heavenly Father. We are His beloved children.

The second place we turn is to the words of the Bible. We go to the clear words of God that proclaim Jesus' victorious death on the cross, the forgiveness of sins it won, and the power of God over the attacks of Satan. 1 John 4 assures us, *He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world* (v. 4).

Knowing that Jesus has saved us, and living in that joy and peace, we tell our story. Like those sailors aboard the USS Laffey, who limped away from battle, scarred and yet victorious, and told their story. Like the man who was once demon-possessed, who was told by Jesus to return to his home, and declare how much God had done for him. We, too, have a story to tell.

Tell that story. It's an epic story of our Savior, Jesus who has delivered us from the destroyer. Amen.