

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 2

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Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft

Jesus beats your bullies

—Luke 8:26-39

*God is bigger than the boogie man
He's bigger than Godzilla, or the monsters on TV
Oh, God is bigger than the boogie man
And He's watching out for you and me*

Who remembers this song from Veggie Tales? This song was meant to instill in children confidence that they do not have to fear silly things like monsters because of God's care. This is a fun song for children. It helped teach kids to trust in God. Although I liked Veggie Tales, I do see where this song lacks. The song only enforces that God is 'bigger than' fake bullies. God is bigger than the boogie man, Godzilla, and monsters, fine, but they aren't real.

A better comfort that I see for children and adults is God is bigger than real bullies. Not only is God bigger than your bullies, but God defeated them in Christ Jesus. Jesus beats your bullies. Jesus gives you deliverance. Jesus sends out his preachers.

This account took place during Jesus' Galilean ministry, the earlier part of his three-year earthly ministry. Jesus and his disciples sailed across the Galilean Sea to the southeastern end. There, they arrived in the region of the Gerasenes. In this general area, there were three cities, Gadara, Gergesa, and Gerasa. We could talk at length about in which city this occurred, but ultimately it was in this region. If you want to know more, you and I can sit down and talk more about it. Nevertheless, in this region, Jesus was approached by a couple of demon-possessed men, as Matthew tells us. Here, Luke focuses on one of them. In this region, Jesus drove out the demons, allowed two thousand pigs to drown, and was driven out of town. In this region, we see that Jesus beats your bullies.

When Jesus arrived in this region on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, this demon-possessed man approached him. Luke gives us some information about the demon-possessed man, but we do not know everything. We do not know his name. We do not know what his life was like. We don't know what brought him under the power of the demons. Was he messing with pagan rituals? We only know that demons possessed him. This demon-possession evidently caused him to get violent. He must have been such a threat that the people needed to bind him down with chains and shackles. Yet, this man broke through his chains under the power of these demons. Then, this man lived out in the tombs. The demons possessed this man, brought him away from society, and caused him to live naked among dead bodies. This is the man that approached Jesus.

The demon-possessed man knew who Jesus was. He knew that Jesus was the Son of the Most High God. Yet, this was not saving knowledge. The demons within the man begged Jesus not to torment them. Yet, Jesus commanded them to leave. Notice that Jesus had complete control over this situation. Jesus didn't drive them out immediately for his own purpose.

Jesus did drive the demons out. The demons who called themselves Legion were driven out of this man. They begged not to be sent back to hell. Jesus allowed them to enter a herd of 2,000 pigs. When the demons entered these pigs, the pigs ran off the cliff into the lake and drowned. Demons cause destruction. Ultimately though, we see here that Jesus saved this man. Jesus drove the demons out of him. Jesus beat his bullies. Jesus delivered him. By the end of this text, we see that this man wasn't just freed from demon-possession, but he was brought to know the love of God and who Jesus is. Yes, Jesus delivered him.

In our 'scientific' world, we do not want to talk about the reality of evil spirits. We do not want to talk about the reality of the devil and his demons. Yet, we must understand the devil and demons are real. The Bible is clear. Numerous times Jesus drives demons out of people. An evil spirit entered Saul. Seven demons were driven out of Mary Magdalene. Paul warns of the teaching of demons. James says that demons know there is a God, and they shudder. Demons are real. They are fallen angels. They are powerful. We are not to mess with them. Yet, they are also under God's punishment.

Some in our society do not want to acknowledge the reality of demons. Some in our society want to obsess about demons and evil forces. Some in our society want to make it all a joke. From all the Bible and especially this account, we see that demons and the devil are not anything we want to mess with. They are real. They are evil.

They want us to suffer in hell with them. Yet, Jesus is greater than them. Jesus delivers his people from the power of these evil forces. Jesus beat these bullies.

Demons possessed this man in the region of the Gerasenes. These thousands of demons wreaked all sorts of havoc in his life. They led the man to live naked among dead bodies away from society. So first, we have a warning for ourselves, don't mess with demons. Don't open the door. Don't mess with mediums, Ouiji boards, and other such things. Demons are real. Don't think that demon-possession couldn't happen today. The scariest thing about such a prospect isn't just being bullied in this life. It isn't tanking your social standing and reputation. The scariest prospect is that it would mean that one would have rejected Christ and gone into slavery to sin, death, and the devil.

While not overlooking the reality of demons, let's also consider other things that enslave, entrap, and pull people away from society. Don't underestimate the devil. He is smart. He is evil. He wants to drag you to hell. Perhaps in our society, obvious demonic activity like this isn't the primary way that these evil spirits will wage against you. Perhaps, the evil spirits would rather drag you down through things that destroy lives and enslave people like addiction. Here is a warning to watch out for these such bullies. Alcohol, drugs, and pornography are addictive. The devil could use these to ensnare a person and drag him away from saving faith. Do you have control of your use of alcohol? Do you have control of your use of prescription drugs? Have you become entangled in using illegal drugs? Have you become entangled in looking at pornographic images? Let's not think that we are immune to such temptations and threats.

All such bullies cause tremendous problems in a person's life. Demon-possession destroyed the life of this man in the Gerasenes. Alcoholism, drug addiction, and porn addiction can ruin careers, marriages, and families. When you reflect on such things, what is the scariest aspect of such bullies? Is it losing money? Is it losing respect? Is it losing family? Such things are a tragedy, yet that demonstrates some improper priorities. Examine your priorities. Your concern for such things ultimately should be the destruction of saving faith. Suppose your greater concern is losing earthly goods instead of your connection to the Triune God. In that case, that demonstrates improper, sinful priorities. Priorities for which you need to repent.

So, look to Jesus. Yes, Jesus beat your bullies. He beat them with his holy life and his innocent suffering and death. After winning the victory over your bullies: sin, death, and the devil, Jesus descended into hell to proclaim his victory and make a public spectacle of them. Then, Jesus rose from the grave. Jesus beat your bullies. Even your greatest enemy, which is your own sinful flesh. Jesus gave you deliverance. You are delivered from the power of sin, death, and the devil. You are delivered from the punishment of hell. You will live forever with your Triune God in heaven.

Jesus delivered that man from the demons by allowing them to enter the herd of 2,000 pigs. Immediately after, the 2,000 pigs went and drowned themselves in the lake. The shepherds and people of the town were mad at Jesus when this happened, understandably so. This would have caused huge economic issues for their town. In the face of this difficulty, what did Jesus do? Did Jesus send them an economist who would explain the financial difficulties? No. Did Jesus send them a government official who would legislate his best solutions? No. Did Jesus make 2,000 new pigs appear? He could have done that, but no. Did Jesus give them the money to replace the pigs like how he made the money for the temple tax appear in a fish in another miracle? No. Jesus did none of these things. Instead, Jesus did what was needed. Jesus sent them a preacher. Jesus told the formerly demon-possessed man to proclaim what God had done for him. That is exactly what he did. He told people about the good news about Jesus. This region faced tremendous financial hardship, and Jesus confronted that bully in an unexpected yet greater way. Jesus sent a preacher.

I am unsure how the trade value of pigs back then would relate to today. Let's suppose for a moment that it is similar. If 2,000 pigs were drowned today, that would be the loss of at least approximately \$500,000, assuming this did not include breeding pigs. It probably did, though. In a world with far fewer people compared to today... think like 3-5% of the world's population... and a world far less connected; how devastating would this loss have been? The people in this region were likely mad and scared. They faced a financial crisis. This is a bully that many fear.

What can we take away from this account for today? We face uncertain times economically. Gas prices are nearing \$6 per gallon. Prices of food are going up. Inflation is rising. Interest rates are rising too. There are reasons for people to fear what is going on today. Jesus' primary concern for these people was not their economic well-being. Instead, Jesus' primary concern for them was their spiritual well-being. In the face of financial ruin, Jesus sent a preacher.

What do you look for during economic uncertainty and financial difficulty? Our ultimate desire should not be physical deliverance from these problems. Such a desire should not come first. Instead, let such times cause us

to realize that we live in a world corrupted by sin that is decaying. Let us keep an eternal mindset and look to Jesus. In these times, Jesus sends us preachers. He sends us men proclaiming his Word, which gives us strength and salvation. His Word proclaims to us his life, death, and resurrection. These preachers also bring to us the tangible Word; the Sacraments.

Perhaps we are facing a major earthly bully of financial ruin. I do not know; I am not an expert in such matters. Ultimately, do not let the devil and his demons use such worries to bully you and pull you away from Jesus. Remember, Jesus beats your bullies. If we are facing financial ruin, come to the church. Jesus sent us his preachers. Hear God's preachers tell you about eternal salvation in Jesus. Bring your children to the font to be baptized, getting God's name placed upon them, and receiving the Holy Spirit. Come to the altar and receive Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

The Gadarene demoniac was delivered by Jesus. Jesus beat his bullies. Jesus beats your bullies too. Jesus delivered you for eternity. Also, he sends you preachers carrying this Word of salvation to you. Amen.