



THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOR

SABBATH SURVIVAL KIT



FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SUNDAY, JUNE 24, 2007

Before God saves us in baptism, we are held prisoner to hostile spiritual forces. Some of them are known to us, and some are of our own making. Often we do not see or recognize the spirits that trouble us. As we come into God's presence today, a word of liberation is announced to us. Today the church remembers with thanksgiving the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus who called God's people to leave the past and enter God's future.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord God, we bring before you the cries of a sorrowing world. In your mercy set us free from the chains that bind us, and defend us from everything that is evil, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

FIRST LESSON - ISAIAH 65:1-9

I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that did not call on my name. I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks; who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine's flesh, with broth of abominable things in their vessels; who say, "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you." These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day long. See, it is written before me: I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their laps their iniquities and their ancestors' iniquities together, says the Lord; because they offered incense on the mountains and reviled me on the hills, I will measure into their laps full payment for their actions. Thus says the Lord: As the wine is found in the cluster, and they say, "Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it," so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all. I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah inheritors of my mountains; my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall settle there.

SECOND LESSON - GALATIANS 3:23-29

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

HOLY GOSPEL - LUKE 8:26-39

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"—for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

I've never been much of a Steve Martin fan, but the movie, Cheaper By The Dozen, is worth our attention today. It's about a Father who has just gotten his dream job of coaching football at his college alma mater. But this job change means his family, including the 12 children, need to move from their beloved home and community for Dad's wish to be fulfilled. No sooner have they settled into their new home than his wife, who has been writing a book on how to successfully raise 12 children, is off to NYC to clinch a deal to have her book published. She discovers this also involves obligatory cross-country tour engagements to promote it. Meanwhile, Coach/Dad is back home trying to handle the tribe of 10 and his new job at the university, a task difficult to manage.

In a last-minute desperate attempt to salvage everything, Coach/Dad comes up with a plan. He has the football team come over to his house for the briefing sessions and then takes the children who aren't already in school to work with him at the university. Trying to work and take care of the kids at both home and school turns out to be a real disaster. Things are so messed up, Coach/Dad finally resorts to lying to his wife on the phone. He tells her he has everything under control, when actually everything is in utter chaos. Meanwhile, university officials and the local media are asking the same question: Can this man coach two teams, the one at home and the one at the university? There's ample evidence that he cannot.

We all know what it feels like to be in over our heads. But the demon-possessed man in today's GL from Luke probably knew it better than most. What happens when you're not prepared for what happens? It can take various forms, as in today's healing story, where we see a variety of reactions.

Jesus arrived by boat; no sooner had he stepped ashore than he met this man possessed. By the time Jesus meets him, the man has been ill for a very long time; from all signs, the man was quite a case. He had gotten to the point of no longer being able to live like a normal person in the village. He lived in a graveyard and ran around naked, yelling and screaming. To protect him from himself, and to protect the villagers, he had to be bound in chains; he was so violent and strong the chains couldn't hold him.

To put it mildly, the man wasn't prepared for a visit by Jesus and so asked him "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" Or was it the demons who said that? It's apparent that the demons are threatened by the very presence of Jesus. He stands out as the only one in the story who is prepared for whatever happens. He knows how to get the upper hand in this explosive situation; once you know the name of the demons, you have them under your control. When the demons heard Jesus calling them by name, they were terrified and begged him not to send them to the abyss, which may have been another name for hell, a place where nobody wanted to go, not even demons.

Ironically, when Jesus drove the demons into a herd of swine, they may have gotten exactly what they were trying to avoid when the pigs rushed down the steep bank and were drowned in the lake.

The herdsmen certainly weren't prepared for what happened. They immediately ran away and told everyone else. Then the townspeople came to see for themselves and they weren't prepared either; to see this previously tormented and violent man, of whom they were so afraid, now sitting quietly at Jesus' feet, mind calmed, listening to his every word. And the townspeople were afraid. They couldn't deal with this man now being healthy. They weren't prepared to handle this healing miracle. It required too much change on their part.

Family counselors see it every so often. If a family is too dysfunctional, when one family member begins to gain some measure of freedom and health, it often shakes the other family members up. They don't want to change.

Jesus himself, rather than stay in what is evidently a hopeless environment, went away as they requested, perhaps to another town more receptive to his ministry.

In gratitude for his new peace of mind, the healed man begs Jesus to let him go with him. Jesus says "Return home and talk about how much God has done for you." And so he did.

Sometimes, we're only prepared for what happens when we realize we weren't really prepared. Other times, things turn out better than we may have expected. When we are wrestling with our own demons, are we open to the possibility of God's healing surprises? Are we willing to accept the changes that will occur? And if so, are we willing to talk about what God has done for us?

Many movies have a Hollywood ending: happily ever after. At least in Cheaper By The Dozen the ending's a little more realistic. This Father comes to his senses when he realizes what an impact fulfilling his dream has had on the rest of the family. Fulfilling his and his wife's dreams has almost cost them their marriage and their family. That was the one thing he was not prepared for. He was not prepared for what his actions did to the rest of the ones he loved. At the end of the movie, like the demon-possessed man in Luke's story, Coach/Dad is now in his right mind. He now knows he prefers the name "Dad" to the name "Coach."

Amen.

BLESSING

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. May you be rooted and grounded in his love. Amen.