

Second Sunday after Pentecost – 2022

Isaiah 65:1-9

Galatians 3:23—4:7

Luke 8:26-39

Do you believe that demons are tougher than you, smarter than you, more resilient and committed and resourceful than you? I don't like to lose. Oh, it happens. Cribbage, tennis, chess – my loses are legion. Still, I don't like it – losing, that is. I'm a competitive sort, I guess. I don't use my horn much, but I sure don't like it when someone takes advantage of me on the road. Does the church lose? The One, Holy, Christian, and Apostolic Church – were we on the winning side in the 20th century and now do we find ourselves on the losing side? Will historians look back on the beginning of the 21st century, Christian historians, and say: "Those were the good old days?"

The world is changing, wouldn't you agree? Sometimes it seems to be changing so much that up is down, east is west, and black is white. What kind of compass are we supposed to use when everything is so topsy-turvy? The basic principles that everyone understood were essential for public discourse have been abandoned. Logic is not en vogue. History is anathema. It's like we are playing a very real-life game of Calvinball. How many of y'all remember Calvinball? Calvin and Hobbes was a genius comic strip. Calvin was an unruly but charismatic young lad and Hobbes was his stuffed tiger who came to life. Calvin grew bored with organized sports and dreamed up Calvinball where the rules changed whenever it suited the participants. Combine croquet, leapfrog and baseball and then import shuttlecocks while trying to capture someone's flag and then tackle the player without the ball and dance a Merengue to make the score Q to 12. In a comic strip, it is head-spinning fun. In real life, it is something less amusing.

Does God like losing? Somehow, I get the feeling that God is not big on losing. St. John wrote this: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). There are no shades of grey in that phrase. The Lord wasn't made man to engage in a perpetual scrum. The eternal Son of God didn't take upon Himself our flesh to put up a good show, or give it the old college try, or to provide humanity with a temporary, seasonal boost in morale (Christmas and Easter). Jesus knew what the strategy was, He knew what was at stake, He knew the opponent and He knew goal. There are rules to this game, the conflict between the Prince of Heaven and the hound of hell. The Lord Christ, seeing His goal, seeing His crucifixion, said this: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:31).

Blood is the rule. Death is the rule. Sacrifice and payment for sin and a righteousness that is impervious to death – that is the rule. Those rules don't change. Christ came to win. Christ came to die. He wins by dying. He thoroughly eviscerates the enemy by allowing the enemy to do to Him whatever it wants to do. That is the victory; Christ crucified. It cannot be undone. There is no answer from hell for a crucified Messiah. It is Jesus' corpse that crushes the head of the serpent; it is finished. That death is so glorious, so omnipotent and overarching and triumphant and definitive and enduring and pervasive that it is literally the answer to every affliction that man will ever face. Death couldn't hold Him. The Crucified King's holiness was such a quality that death was forced, (forced!), to release its grasp. He is risen. The Author of

Life destroyed death by dying. The one who is the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning is undone; not somewhat, not partially – completely. Jesus lives, the victory's won.

A man was possessed. Demons afflicted him with their dark spirits. Legion were they. A Roman legion was an occupying force, fortified for a long campaign. 6000 swords were a legion. This grim occupying force reduced the beleaguered man to an animal state. Wearing no clothes, living in no house, the distressed soul took up residence among the dead (among the tombs). Then he met Jesus. Light of Light came into that man's darkness. One demonic voice speaks for the legion. "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me" (Luke 8:28). The abyss; the demons were aware of Christ's authority and they know the abyss is their future. A herd of swine is nearby and the Lord commands the demons into the pigs and they run headlong into the lake and choke to death, drowned with their evil.

Jesus has authority and He uses it. He knows what victory is and He pursues it with unrelenting focus. His ways are not our ways. God ways are higher than man's ways (Isaiah 55:9). He sees a deeper picture, a fuller and more complete picture, an eternal victory. We have it! On one occasion, Jesus sent out His disciples, 72 of them, to proclaim the kingdom of God. They were to take no extra resources for their endeavor; just the Word! Take note of this: when the 72 returned they returned with great joy and said this: "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!" (Luke 10:17). The Word! In reply to the 72 Jesus said something that you do well to remember, remember and apply to the world today: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Where the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity there the demonic is in retreat. The Word conveys the once-for-all victory that is in Jesus' blood, in Jesus' resurrection. We have that Word. We are anchored, bonded to that victory. You may think that this is the worst of times but I have news for you – this is the best of times.

On the night of Jesus' betrayal, as Judas left the Upper Room, John tells us ominously: "And it was night" (John 13:30). As Jesus is arrested, He described the event in cosmic terms: "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). Light had come into the world but people loved darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil (John 3:19). God's ways are not our ways. I would have done as Peter did. Peter tried to defend Christ – with a sword. As Jesus was being arrested, Simon Peter took off the ear of the servant of the high priest. "Put your sword back in its place." "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he would at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:52-53). It isn't as though Jesus didn't know what Satan was attempting. Satan was attempting to wrap the whole world in darkness. Sin and death and sickness and disease and demon possession and perversion and chaos and rebellion were all unleashed on one solitary figure. That is God's will, His strategy, His intent.

Jesus wins by losing. Jesus defeats the enemy by being humiliated, by spending His life, by opening up His divine flesh to pure darkness. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5). God wins! Resurrection, ineffable light, pure victory and an absolution that crushes the night of sin. The Word of the Gospel is the light of our time. This is the best of times. We have the Word. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). We have the Word. We have the light of life. We have a victory that knows no bounds. No demonic horde can undo our victory.

This is no time for Christians to look at their shoe tops. Shame on us for doubting what God is doing. He is saving sinners. He is enlarging His church. He is making His light shine. In Christ is life and that life is the light of men (John 1:4). Jesus brought peace to that demon possessed man. At the end of the episode, the man with the legion of demons was sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. That is where we are – sitting now at the feet of the Master, clothed in His righteousness and by faith we are in our right mind. His Word is here. His victory and His life and His forgiveness and His love are all here. This is our hour – the hour light and hope and truth and heaven. The man begged Jesus: Let me go with you. “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you” (Luke 8:39). Yes, so he did. God was good to him; he knew it. And you? “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).