

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

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Luke the eleventh chapter beginning at the fourteenth verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. ¹⁵ But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." ¹⁶ Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷ But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. ¹⁸ "If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out

demons by Beelzebub. ¹⁹ "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²¹ "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. ²² "But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. ²³ "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. ²⁴ "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' ²⁵ "And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. ²⁶ "Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." ²⁷ And it

happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!"²⁸ But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Heavenly Father these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

When you were born, you were no better than the man at the beginning of our Gospel account today. You had a demon inside of you, you were mute, you were deaf, you were dumb, you were blind... Maybe physically some of that is true, but spiritually all of this is true for each and every one of us. When we are conceived,

really, we are conceived in sin and thus from our conception we are enemies of God. We do not love Him, we do not trust in Him, we do not concern ourselves with Him... instead our only focus is ourselves.

And then, just like in the text, Christ comes and He casts out the demon from us. When we are baptized, when an exorcism is done, then God claims us as His own and we become His child. We are not longer ruled by our old sinful nature; rather God and His Holy Spirit rule in our hearts and in our lives. Through baptism they now have a foothold with which they launch their own attack against satan and all of his wiles.

Yes, all of this happens in your baptism, all of this takes place when God's word gets a foothold in our lives and our hearts and we are claimed as His own. And it is from that time on that God can look at us and He can call us "***Blessed...***"

However, just like when Christ is casting out a demon, we too have to deal with people and churches who claim that God working in our lives and through His means is not God.

Just after Christ helps this man and gives him a new life, people are right there ready to discredit Jesus and what He has done. The Son of God just helped someone and cast out a demon and people are, truly, calling Jesus a worshipper and follower of satan. “He casts out demons by Beelzebub,” they call out against Jesus. Others, of course, were looking for some other miracle, because casting out a demon just wasn’t enough for them.

And it is, in our day and age that we have churches and peoples who will claim that though a person is baptized, though God has taken a foothold in their life, unless they see another miracle from this person they are not

going to heaven. If they don’t speak in tongues, or hold on to snakes, or heal people... then obviously it didn’t work. Obviously God and His word are not powerful enough and did not work in this person.

And honestly, even we do this at times. God has come into our lives and He has driven satan out of our hearts and he has claimed each one of us in the waters of baptism... and yet we still want more signs. Though God has defeated satan, we want more. Maybe if God would give me the job I really want, then I can believe that He is a God. Maybe if God would heal my spouse then I can believe that He really is God. Maybe if God would darken the sun, or make it stand still like He did for Joshua, then I could believe that He is a God... but all He did for me was put some water on my head and every now and then He gives me some bread and wine.

Yes, we are just like those who watched Jesus cast out a demon... we are unimpressed; and maybe it is then that we should truly worry. When we see the mighty hand of God in action and we are unimpressed... what does that say about us? We see God rescue another soul from hell and we yawn at it. We see God claim another child as His own and we want to see 'bigger things.' We see God's hand in action and we just to make sure church is done by 10:00am.

As Johan Gerhard says about this text, "there were found some who tempted Him, and required a sign from heaven - this miracle simply was not enough for one to base his confession of Christ as the Messiah. He had to perform signs from heaven - perhaps if He might let some manna rain down, or make the sun stand still, or let fire fall from heaven." And these things are spoken by

those in attendance and by us, when we let satan have reign within us. Though we have been witnesses and recipients of a miracle of God, we let satan rule in our hearts and our minds when we put God to the test like this.

And though God came into our lives and pushed satan out, once he went out and gathered himself, like the spirit in the story that Christ tells, and satan comes back and finds our hearts in nice array but without our paying attention and he and other demons come in a possess us once again. What terror and dread we should have when a text like the one today is before us. We know that we are not perfect children and we know that we fall many times... and, I pray, that we know we are of no help to ourselves.

However, we need to turn to the words of Christ yet again. "But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he

trusted, and divides his spoils.” And dear friends, Christ is that stronger man.

When Christ comes into our lives through baptism and through God’s word and through His holy supper, then He is stronger than satan and He, Jesus Christ, overcomes satan. Jesus did this not through miracles from heaven, but through His very life and death for each and every one of us.

Jesus lived a perfect life, in perfect accordance to God’s word. He helped all kinds of people (sick, maimed, dead, possessed), and He made sure that He preached the word of God as he went about His work. And though He was the perfect child of God, the Savior of the world, He would suffer and die for our sake. He suffered and died because of all the sins that we commit. He suffered and died for all the times that we want a ‘better’ sign, or when we fail to heed God’s word.

However, we know that Jesus Christ did not stay dead. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead to proclaim that He has conquered satan, He had destroyed satan’s reign, and now He is and always will be the “strongest” man in the battle. And through faith in all that Christ has done for us, we know that this is true and we know that heaven is ours when this life is over.

As Gerhard says, “*it is the greatest miraculous sign that the Son of God will suffer, die, lie in the grave for three days, and then immediately come forth alive, just as it is typically portrayed in the history of Jonah. The true believers are to be satisfied with this sign and require none other.*” And so I pray that we are... we do not need some heavenly miracle (manna, the sun stopping, or the like); rather, we can put our faith and our trust in the knowledge, in the truth, that

Jesus Christ lived, suffered, died, and rose again for each and every one of us.

And as this portion of Scripture is concluded, so too I encourage you, I admonish you, to hear the word of God and obey it, to keep it. Yes, now that we know redemption and salvation are ours, we can now look to Christ for the strength that we need to keep His word. We can love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul. We can love our neighbors as ourselves. We can honor our parents. We can refrain from stealing, lying, cheating on our spouses... we can begin to follow God's commandments and God's words because Jesus has strengthened us and the Holy Spirit has given us this ability.

Dear friends in Christ, each and every one of us is born deaf, dumb, and blind to God. We are not worthy of anything that He offers to us. We deserve nothing but hell and

damnation. And yet, thanks be to God that through His Son Jesus Christ that is not what we receive. Just like the man in our text had a spirit cast out of him, so we too, at our baptisms, have an evil spirit cast out of us. When God claims us as His own, well we see a great miracle. We see a sinner, a person condemned to hell, raised to heaven. And thanks be to God, that He has allowed us to be partakers of this miracle.

And now through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ, the true 'strongest' man of this account, we know that satan is defeated. Though we know that many times we like to help that defeated foe, when we cling to Christ and when we obey and keep the word of God then we know that Christ has indeed defeated this foe and He has done it for us.

Thanks be to God that He is the 'strongest' in the fight and that He has already won all the victories. Thanks be to God that though

we falter many times in our lives, His word is there to strengthen our faith through His Holy Spirit. And thanks be to God that because of our Savior Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us, we too can be called, “*Blessed.*”

Thanks be to God. Amen.