

Sermon for the Second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7C) June 22, 2025 jj
Rev'd Mark B. Stirdivant, Christ our Savior Ev. Lutheran Church, St. Augustine, Florida

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The Word is near you, as you have already heard in our liturgy today, the Word is so near, in fact, that it is in your mouth and in your heart. The Word of faith that we proclaim, the Apostle Paul says, this is the Word that possesses the power to enter your heart, and give you the faith to trust in Jesus. With the heart one believes, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. It is this Word that makes all the difference.

Why is that? Because only the Word has the power to come near to you. You cannot search for the Word, nor can you wander around in your own efforts and stumble upon it by yourself. Recall how Isaiah's words (Isaiah 65) began: I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me. You see, it was worse that you might have imagined: God had to seek out and save not only those who were lost, but the lost were in reality actively opposed to Him! He had to turn you from a lover of darkness, one who even preferred darkness, now into a child of the Light of life. I know we didn't baptize a baby today, but if we had, you could think of those baptisms where the baby screams, cries, wiggles trying to get away—that's closer to what it really is like!

Or we could think about the poor man whom Jesus heals today in the Gospel (Luke 8:26 and following). The Word, namely Jesus the Word who became flesh, He approached the man who had many demons, sometimes called unclean spirits. He was from the city, but did not live in the city anymore. He couldn't even live in his own house, but was banished by his unseen tormentors into the place of death—that is to say, Satan's home field since he has been a liar and a murderer from the beginning. Jesus not only left His heavenly throne to rescue this man, like He did also for you and me, but He also sailed across the sometimes stormy Sea of

Galilee to the country located on the opposite shore, a country not under the smile of God's blessings and promises but a non-kosher kingdom where they keep pigs.

The Legion of demons appeared to have won a long series of military victories over this man's soul. They had taken over his name, his identity. Their inhuman strength possessed this man to break away several man-made chains and shackles, yet he would not be free. He would continue on in an ever-increasing slavery, stronger than any we might complain about on earth. His naked shame would have been his permanent fate, living alone far away from family and friends, never to be in his right mind again. The Apostle James reminds us that sin which afflicts and tempts you and me doesn't start out looking like what was tormenting this man. It begins enticingly, innocent-looking even. A chance word of gossip to bend your ear. A brief look at a picture on the Internet or social media feed. A brief moment of anger that you were justified to react with against someone who hurt you. The devil and his evil armies attack in these subtle ways, but the sinful nature you're born with is their traitorous ally. The frog is boiled to death by a gradual turning up of the heat, rather than an instant hot that prompts it to jump out of the pot to safety.

As He did for this man, the Lord also came near to you, sailing over the destructive, flood-producing waters of your Baptism to yank the legion of demons out of you, even the ones you had permitted to take up residence. Martin Luther kept the words of exorcism in the baptism ritual, not because he was still caught up in medieval superstition, but because he knew demons will persist in their attacks against the entire human race until the Last Day of the world. They will simply keep adopting new and clever tactics and masks to hide their true

ugliness, stinky death and frightening darkness. Baptism itself, Luther and our liturgy teach us, Baptism is the exorcism that you need, that I need, the exorcism Jesus does for us with no less power for us than He did for this man in Luke 8. Baptism's power is from the Word Jesus spoke, and that power was generated from the death Jesus died as a payment for all sin on the cross, as a death-blow victory over the devil, his evil angels, and death itself. Your Baptism pulls you out of the lonely tombs where you wallow in nakedness and instead clothes you in the white robes of Jesus' clean, warm purity. He restores you in this cleansing flood to the community of His family, the Church, which is why this baptismal font is normally located back there, at the entrance, as your reminder as you walk past it—your Baptism is your entry access into God's gracious, forgiving presence. You are no longer a slave, Apostle Paul rejoices, but an adopted Son—that is to say, Jesus made you just like He is in relationship to the Father. Rather than a legion of demons taking over your identity and speech, you have the strong Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to claim as your own, His voice to speak the power that makes demons and sins and death flee like crazed pigs into the sea.

What a change in you that Baptism has done! Notice how the people of that foreign city and the swineherds were more afraid of the man now restored to his right mind, than they were when he was a naked, blubbing fool, breaking chains and wandering in cemeteries. Dear Baptized children of the heavenly Father, the world won't know what to do with you, either. Society will not sit idly by as you proclaim with your God-given loving words and actions Jesus the Savior of all people. You are a threat. Tolerance does not apply to you. The devil will send unclean spirits to attack you, even if they use the people you once had trusted, as Peter tried to stop Jesus, who then replied, Get thee behind me, Satan!

Yes, it is certain we are fighting a battle, but as Paul also says, our battle is not against mere flesh-and-blood people, but against the legions of darkness that array themselves against the light. The tormentors know that the final torment is arranged for them. They will not escape. They will not be set free. You, dear Baptized, have been set free. You will not join them in hell. The new wine is found in the cluster, which means with Jesus, it's never too late for you or for those on your mind and heart right now. Your forever home is with the Lord who bought you and the entire world back with His own blood. The healed man had people who heard what he said, when he declared how much God had done for him. That was the Word that came near to him, now occupying his heart, mind and now his mouth.

That same Word is near you now. He, that is Jesus the Word, is in your heart and mouth. He is speaking through your words and actions to others, spreading His love and genuine liberty for others as He has also given you. Rather than evil taking over your identity, the forgiveness of your sins becomes not only your joy, but now it will be the joy of everyone who knows you and meets you. Return to your home, to your daily calling in life. Jesus will be there, too. The Holy Spirit inhabits you, urging you to spot and take seriously those innocent-looking potential temptations and footholds that wish to bring you back into captivity. Hop out now, even though the water of temptation may still be comfortably warm. Confident of the Lord's mercy, you need not fall for the tricks of Satan's deceit. Take comfort in your Baptism for the rest of your life, because despite whatever trial or attack you may face, the Word that is near you, the Word that turned your darkness to light—this is the Word of faith that you hear, the Word that you taste under bread and wine, that Word you confess, and so you are saved.

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.