

St. Peter Lutheran Church
March 8, 2026
Third Sunday in Lent (Oculi)
Luke 11:14-28

We learn a couple things in this Gospel. First, the kingdom of Satan is overcome by the kingdom of God which comes in Christ Jesus. Second, when Christ's kingdom confronts the devil's kingdom, there are three responses. First, some marvel, recognizing Christ's work to be the very work of God, the kingdom of heaven coming to them. Second, some blaspheme, calling God's work the devil's work, and third, some are not satisfied with God's work the way He is doing it, but demand a different sign from heaven, one of their own imagination.

Jesus was casting out a demon, and it was mute. The man was under the sway of the evil one, possessed by a demon that prevented him from speaking. Matthew tells us the man also was blind. His senses were taken from him by the demon. The man was unable to rid himself of this demon or restore his senses. Satan has a kingdom, and this man belonged to Satan. The man was captive. He had no power over his oppressor. But Christ does. Christ also has a kingdom. And He is stronger than Satan. Christ is the one through whom all things were made. Christ is the Creator. Satan, his creature. When Christ comes and displaces the demon, it has no choice but to leave the man. **So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke.**

So we see the situation of every child of Adam. Each of us is captive to the evil one, sons of the devil, until Christ claims us as His own and makes us sons of His Kingdom. Christ is the Stronger One. And He not only displaces demons and releases people from the clutches of the evil one in this life. No, Christ completely plunders us from the devil. He storms his palace and takes his goods for Himself.

We have sinned, and the wages of sin is death. Our sins have earned us God's displeasure and punishment—torment and hell. We, by our own sins, deserve God's eternal condemnation and God is just. Satan, the accuser, is in the business of reminding people of this every opportunity he has. And he used to like to bring these accusations even before God.

But Christ entirely strips Satan of this power, for Christ who is without sin, willingly took your sins and mine, and gave Himself into death. Satan, in his mad fury against God, played right along. Satan entered Judas to betray the Lord. Satan helped the sacrificial Lamb to His altar. Christ, who had become sin for us, suffered its awful penalty and died. **Christ suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.** Satan had his day when Christ lay still in the grave, but it was very short-lived. The Stronger One did not see corruption—God did not allow it. And being made alive in the Spirit, Christ went and preached to the souls in prison, proclaiming victory even to the dead. Having died for the sins of the world, Satan, the accuser of mankind, has nothing left to accuse us of, and death cannot hold us, for Christ took our sins and died for them and then took back His life again, rising on the third day.

When Christ comes to each of us poor sinners, blind to God, deaf to Him, and unable to speak His praises, Christ delivers us from the domain of darkness, casts out the unclean spirit, and gives us His Holy Spirit. For He has plundered us from the devil by His own suffering, death, and resurrection. He can claim us as His own because He purchased us by His own Blood.

And Christ continues this miraculous work, just like He did for the man with the mute demon. Christ has equipped the Church for this continued task. He has given us His Word, which even when spoken by us poor men, has the power and presence of Christ against all evil. He gives us Baptism, where we are snatched out of the devil's defeated kingdom and delivered into the victorious Kingdom of Christ. And as our sinful nature continues to afflict us until He makes all things new, He gives us His Holy Absolution, won by his suffering and death, daily and richly forgiving us. Christ gives us His Spirit. Christ opens our eyes, unstops our ears, and looses our mouths. We hear Him, we believe Him, we belong to Him, and we praise Him. And should we ever doubt that Christ's death was for us, He gives us His Body to eat and Blood to drink, for *you*, for the forgiveness of *yours* sins.

When Christ does this great work, the three responses from the Gospel ensue. Some marvel, praising God for His mercy in Jesus. Others blaspheme Christ, even calling His work the devil's work. And others aren't satisfied with these miracles and demand other signs.

In the Gospel, Jesus primary deals the blasphemers. These are the ones who said, **“He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.”** A name carried over from a false god of the Canaanites becomes a name associated with Satan himself. So these blasphemers attribute Jesus' work, done in the Holy Spirit, to be the work of Satan. Our Lord counters these blasphemers with a simple line of reasoning—how could Jesus be dismantling Satan's kingdom by the power of Satan? This would mean destruction for Satan's empire. It simply can't be the case. Furthermore, Jesus says, what about the other exorcists, even those of their own sons? Fellow Jews? If Jesus' exorcisms are Satan's work, what then of their own exorcisms?

But, Jesus says, if instead of this being Satan's work, you are in fact witnessing **the finger of God**, then **surely the kingdom of God has come upon you**. The “finger of God” is what the magicians of Egypt acknowledged was at work in the mighty signs and wonders which they could not replicate. Satan and his demons have much trickery, much ability to mimic God as brutish apes, but this work—casting out demons and releasing people from Satan's dominion—*this is the work of God*. This is accomplished by the Mighty One announced by John the Baptist, the Christ of God, anointed by the Spirit, working even as His Father is working—the One who comes, conquers, and divides the spoils.

Christ brings God's kingdom, not Satan's. And the lines drawn between the two are sharp. **He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters**. No kingdom can be divided, and God's kingdom certainly is not. No one can be against Jesus and for God. One who does not gather in Jesus' name, scatters and destroys along with Satan.

Then our Lord leaves a somber warning. Christ casts out demons. But those demons must be replaced and kept at bay by the Holy Spirit, or else, the unclean spirit returns with **seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of the man is worse than the first.** Christ and His Spirit must abide in a person, for no house will remain empty. There is no neutral ground between these kingdoms. A person's soul is either occupied by Jesus or the devil. And if Jesus has once cleaned out the house, and it becomes vacant, the devil comes back in greater force, leaving the man worse off than he was before. So we pray, "Take not Your Holy Spirit from me." If God leaves us, we belong again to the devil. To walk away from Church is to become a sitting duck for Satan.

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!"

A very pious exclamation indeed, but Jesus wants to stay on point and make sure we understand what is at stake and what is important for our salvation. So **He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"** Hang on to it! As tight as you can! Never let go! The Word of God (even Christ our Lord) cast out the unclean spirits in us and filled us with the Holy Spirit. Christ's words are Spirit and life. *Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given.* That's what we keep and hang on to! Jesus says, **If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.**

Christ continues His work, here in His holy Church, casting out demons and claiming souls for His own Kingdom. Christ, who won our salvation by His cross, brings His life and salvation through His word, filling us with His Holy Spirit. Some will marvel by what Christ does here. Others will blaspheme God. And still others will say they want a better sign, something more believable. Their hearts will remain hard, even as they witness the finger of God. Whatever the reaction of those who hear, the reality remains—the kingdom of God has come upon us. Christ reigns in His Church by His Word—hear it faithfully, receive it when it is offered. By His Word, Christ gives his Body and Blood to you—take it, often, purposefully, knowing how much you need Him. Christ, whose kingdom comes by His Word and Spirit, will rule and keep you, protect you from all evil, and bring you to everlasting life. Amen