

March 18, 2026 – Ephesians 2:1-10 & Mark 5:1-13

There's a temptation to think of the world as neutral ground. A place where people simply make choices, some good, some bad, with complete free-will. A place where sin is merely a mistake and evil is just an unfortunate part of human nature.

But St. Paul doesn't let us to think that way. In Ephesians 2, he shows what's really happening, beyond what our senses can perceive: *“You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air.”*

This world is not neutral ground. Anything but. This world is a battlefield. And worse than that, it's a battlefield where we were born not merely as innocent bystanders, caught in the crossfire. We were born on the wrong side. Following the prince of the power of the air. Following the devil.

Not resisting him. Not struggling against him. Following him. And not reluctantly, either. Paul says, *“we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.”* We did what we wanted. We did what seemed right. We did what felt good. And so, *“we were by nature children of wrath.”*

That's how we were born. That's who we were. We weren't victims. We were participants. Enemy combatants. Soldiers fighting on the wrong side. Which means that when we come to the Gospels and see a man possessed by demons, we shouldn't be too quick to distance ourselves. We shouldn't just immediately say, *“That man is nothing like me.”* Because apart from Christ, he's a lot closer to our sinful state than we'd like to admit.

Let's take a look at the man in Mark 5. He lives among the tombs, cut off from his family and his community. He cries out day and night. He hurts himself. He's bound with chains, but he breaks them apart. No one can subdue him.

It's a terrifying picture. A man utterly under the control of forces he can't resist. But then again, what does Paul say? *“You were dead.”* Not sick. Not struggling. Dead. And what is death, spiritually, but complete inability to fight back? No power to free yourself. No strength to escape. No will to turn to God.

The man among the tombs shows outwardly what is true inwardly of all humanity apart from Christ. A life ruled by powers beyond our ability to resist. A will bent away from God. A condition we can't fix. And yet, into this darkness, Jesus comes. He crosses the sea. He steps onto that unclean land. He goes directly to the place no one else would go.

And how do the demons respond? *“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.”* The demons know exactly who Jesus is. They confess Him as the Son of the Most High God. They recognize His authority. And they are terrified of him.

And yet they still try to control the situation. They beg. They plead. They negotiate. *“My name is Legion, for we are many.’ And they begged Him earnestly not to send them out of the country.”*

Then they make a request: *“Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.”* It's kind of a strange moment. The demons sound desperate, pitiful, almost sympathetic. And that's precisely the danger.

Because evil often presents itself in this way. Not as something horrifying and monstrous, like it really is. But as something sympathetic. Something reasonable. Something that just wants a little space. A little permission. A little compromise. *“Do not torment us,”* the demons say, as if they are the victims.

But what have they done? They've taken a man created in the image of God and reduced him to a wild animal. They have isolated him, dehumanized him, and destroyed his life. And yet they talk as though they deserve mercy.

This is how the devil still works. Sin rarely presents itself as outright destruction. It comes as something understandable, something justifiable, something even deserving of compassion. *“It's not that bad.” “It's only human.” “Don't be so harsh.” “They're not hurting anyone else.” “Let them be themselves.”*

Sin always pleads its case. Evil asks for sympathy. The devil disguises himself, not as a monster, but as something reasonable. A demon of darkness masquerading as an angel of light.

But Christ isn't deceived. He doesn't negotiate with the demons. He doesn't grant them dignity. He doesn't entertain their claims. He commands. And with a word, they are cast out.

The demons think they'll find freedom in the pigs, but at Christ's command, the whole herd rushes down the steep bank into the sea and is drowned. It is sudden, violent, and total, because that is how Christ deals with evil. Not by managing it, not by tolerating it, but by destroying it.

Those pigs, rushing into the water and drowning, show what Christ has come to do not only to demons, but to the sin that clings to us. Because the old Adam still very much has a pull on us. He still whispers in our ear. He still turns us in on ourselves. He still very much follows the prince of the power of the air. And he still very much wants us to act like a son of disobedience. A child destined only for God's wrath. The battle doesn't end when we become a Christian. In fact, it's only just getting started.

We like to listen to the voices in and around us. The devil, the world, our sinful flesh. We like to reason with them. Excuse them. Sympathize with them. Find a way to let them live alongside us. Keep a little portion of our lives for the tombs and the pigs: a place set aside for death and unclean things. But Christ does not. He has come to drown them.

*“But God, being rich in mercy... made us alive together with Christ.”* You were dead, but God made you alive. Not because you fought your way free. Not because you improved yourself. Not because you resisted the devil on your own. God made us alive. He acted. He intervened. He raised you. *“By grace you have been saved.”*

And how does He deliver that grace to you? Through water. Just as the pigs were drowned in the sea, so your old Adam is drowned in the waters of Holy Baptism. There, Christ meets you. There, He speaks His Word. There, He casts out the dominion of sin and death. There, He buries the old self and raises up a new one.

It doesn't look quite as dramatic as our Gospel lesson. There are no herds rushing into the sea. No demons crying out. But Christ is still at work. With the same authority, the same power, and the same victory over sin, death, and the devil. Your Baptism isn't a symbol. It's a battlefield. A war that Christ has already won.

And yet the struggle continues in this life. The old Adam doesn't go quietly. Sin continues to tempt. The devil continues to disguise himself. And we have to learn, one battle at a time, that you don't negotiate with sin. You don't sympathize with it. You don't give it space. You don't tolerate its existence. You bring it to the One who casts out demons.

You hear His Word. You receive His forgiveness. You remember your Baptism. That, as Martin Luther puts it, the old Adam in you should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

That's your life now. Not a life of neutrality. Not a life of compromise. But a life in which Christ is continually at work, driving out what doesn't belong and restoring what He has redeemed.

Because the same Jesus who stepped onto that shore still steps into your life. The same Jesus who faced down the Legion still speaks against the powers of darkness. The same Jesus who cast them out still has authority over every sin, every temptation, every force that would claim you. And He doesn't come reluctantly. He comes willingly. He crosses every distance. He enters every darkness. He speaks into every tomb.

Because He desires your freedom. Because He has claimed you as His own. Because He has already won the victory at the cross, where he destroyed the power of death. And in His resurrection, He has declared that victory complete.

So you are no longer what you once were. You are no longer dead. You are no longer enslaved. You are no longer following the prince of the power of the air. You are alive. Alive in Christ. Freed by His Word. Washed in His Baptism. And destined not for the tombs, but for the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.