

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, May 26, 2019

Rev. John Tapscott

“HE TORMENTS OUR TORMENTORS”

Luke 8:28

The hockey season is coming to an end. One more series. The Stanley Cup Champion will soon be crowned. It may be a team many of do not like very much. I apologize if you are a Boston Bruins fan, but I am not.

A question was recently sent in to Kevin McGran, the editor of the Toronto Star sports mailbag. A fan named Carlos wrote, “Leaf fans should take heart. (Bruins’ players) Zdeno Chara is 42, Patrice Bergeron is 34, David Krejci is 33. How much longer can they torment you? Good luck to the Bruins when Chara is gone. What do you think Mr. McGran?” McGran answered sadly that “Chara is going to play another year.” In other words, he will be torment the Maple Leafs and their fans next season, too. For Leaf players and fans, Chara is the great tormentor.

I want to tell you today about another great tormentor. His name is Jesus. Yes, that’s right. Jesus Christ is the great tormentor. That may sound surprising, but its what our Gospel reading today reveals. Jesus Christ torments and ultimately overcomes our tormentors.

Luke 8:26-29. Jesus arrived by boat in Gentile territory. As soon as Jesus stepped on land, a man who had demons met him. He was a pitiable soul, naked, living in caves. An unclean spirit often seized him, and when the people tried to shackle him, he would break the bonds with great strength and dash wildly into the wilderness. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you do not torment me...” The demon had even taken control even of the man’s voice. It shouted out because it knew who Jesus was. The demon realized that in Jesus, it had met its match. The end was at hand. The demon could only beg Jesus not to torment it. But Jesus was already tormenting that demon. He had already commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. Jesus then asked, “What is your name?” The man or perhaps the demon answered “Legion”, for a multitude of demons had found their way into this poor soul. He seemed to be their special target.

The demons begged Jesus not to send them back into the abyss, the lair of Satan, from which they had come. Instead they begged Jesus to let them enter a herd of pigs feeding on the hillside. So Jesus gave them permission. The demons were fooled, for the swine rushed down the steep bank into the lake. And as the pigs drowned, these demons were destroyed forever. At least in the abyss the demons would have been still alive. But Jesus tormented the demons and destroyed them. Jesus proved his authority and his power over them. The man from whom the

demons had gone sat at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And if you are worried about the pigs, well, they were worth something for sure, but not nearly as much as the well-being of this one man. God has made us in his own image and our health in body, mind and spirit is God's top priority, even if it means the loss of something else God has created. This is why God sent his Son into the world. Jesus became flesh and stepped on this earth to break the chains that bind us and to set us free.

Now Satan has certainly set a legion of demons loose in this world. And each of us is tormented by some demon, perhaps not a legion of them, but some demon or other.

What are the demons that torment us? Well, we can name some of them - anxiety, guilt, a sense of despair, a lack of self-worth or self-confidence. How many broken people there are among us and in this world. So many are tormented by illness in body, mind and spirit. Heavy burdens can torment us. Overwork for one, in these days when more and more is demanded from us. Underwork can torment us as well. Idleness and a lack of purpose afflicts many people. We humans are tormented by temptations and by our weakness in the face of them. So many are tormented by addictions - booze, drugs, debt, overspending, pornography, gambling, computer screens. We can be tormented by envy and rage and loneliness. People of faith can be tormented by doubt. Is God really who the Bible says he is? Can his promises be trusted? Will our personal faith hold out and see us through until the day of Jesus Christ? Or will it weaken and collapse under the pressure of secularism and atheism? Sometimes we are tormented by flesh and blood. It may be an overbearing boss or a difficult co-worker or an annoying neighbour, or perhaps a wayward child. For children the tormentors could be bullies at school.

One huge tormentor shows up in this story – fear. When the pig keepers saw what had happened they ran and told the townspeople. When the people came out they saw the man sitting at the feet of Jesus, made well again. What was their reaction? They were afraid. If Jesus could deal with a legion of demons, who knows what else he might do among them? A new and very great power was at work among them. This Jesus could change everything. He might change them, their whole way of thinking and living. Better just to leave things as they are. So they asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized by the demon of fear.

The demon of fear can get into us, too. It may be the greatest tormentor of all. We often fear change, even change for the better. We may fear the future. We wake up at night, seized with fear over what lies ahead, wondering how we will ever deal with it all. We may not admit it often, but we may fear our inevitable bodily decline. We may fear death. We may fear being rejected by God. How can a sinner stand before the Holy God in the day of Jesus Christ and be accepted? Fear is a huge tormentor.

But it's just one of many. The unclean spirits that torment us are legion. Satan loves sending up demons from the abyss to haunt us. We may not be like the poor soul in the story who was filled with a legion of demons. But even one or two demons can get inside us and drive us out of our right minds. They can bind us and even destroy us.

Thankfully, there is one greater than the demons that torment us. His name is Jesus. He is the great tormentor. But God did not send him to torment us. Instead, God sent him to torment and overcome the things that torment us in body, mind and spirit. Now Jesus' Kingdom of love and peace and justice threatened the political and religious establishment. The changes he brought were too much. And he wasn't just asked to leave. He was driven out, nailed to a cross where he took his last dying breath, and was buried. It was the ultimate rejection. On the Cross, all the legions of demons directed their full attack on Jesus. But this was the means by which God took on the demons of sin and evil and death which bind us and would send us to the abyss. Then God raised his crucified Son from the dead and overcame these and all tormenting demons. He took away their ultimate power.

The demons cry out, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me..." But Jesus does. Jesus Christ torments and ultimately overcomes our tormentors. He is doing it now, for those who call on him.

A man sat alone in a hotel room in Vancouver, B.C., deeply depressed, so depressed that he couldn't even go downstairs to the restaurant to eat. He was a powerful man and the chairman of a large shipping company but he felt overwhelmed by the pressures and demands of life.

All his life, he worried about everything, every detail. He agonized about his business, his investments, his decisions, his family, his health. Finally, anxiety got the best of him. Paralyzed by despair, lying on his bed, he moaned out loud: "Life isn't worth living this way, I wish I were dead!" And then, he wondered what God would think if he heard him talking this way. Speaking aloud again he said, "God, it's a joke, isn't it? Life is nothing but a joke." Suddenly, he realized that this was the first time he'd talked to God since he was a boy. He was silent for a moment then began to pray. He said: "I just talked out loud about what a mess my life was in and how much I wanted things to be different. And you know what happened next? A voice!! I heard a voice say, 'It doesn't have to be that way!' That's all."

He went home and told his wife about what had happened. He talked to a minister and asked, "Do you think it was God speaking to me?" The minister said: "Of course, because that is the message of God to everyone of us. That's the message of the Bible. Jesus Christ came into the world to save us, to deliver us, to free us, to change us and to show us that 'It doesn't have to be that way.'" A few days later, the man called the minister and said, "You were right. It has really happened. I've had a rebirth. I'm a new man. Christ has turned it around for me."

Well, the man is still prone to anxiety. He still works hard. But, now he has a source of strength. During the week, he sometimes leaves work and goes to a church near his office. He sits there and prays. He says: "It clears my head. It reminds me of who I am and whose I am. Each time as I sit there in the Sanctuary, I think back to that day in the hotel room and how lost I felt, and I hear that voice saying: 'It doesn't have to be that way.'"

Demons shout, "What have you do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you do not torment me..." But he does. Jesus Christ torments and overcomes our tormentors. He is doing it right now as we turn to him in faith. By the power of the Holy Spirit he has arrived here

among us today. He is commanding unclean spirits to come out. His perfect love is casting out our fears. He is putting a right mind in us and straightening out our thinking. He is giving us peace. And if your demon is of flesh and blood, Christ is giving you strength and wisdom to deal with that person appropriately. He is showing you the way forward or the way out. Or he may be at work in those people, changing them, ordering them to stop their tormenting behaviour.

Demons do not have a free ride in this world. Jesus is their greatest fear. At the name of Jesus, demons shudder. He spells their doom. So demons may trouble you for a time, but they cannot finally have their way with you. They cannot send you to the abyss, because Jesus has gone to the abyss for you. You and I are safe in his strong love forever. Because we trust in him we know we will be accepted by God on the last day, covered with the righteous robes of Christ. Our salvation unto eternal life comes from his work, not ours.

The Heavenly Man is on our side, now and forever. He fights our battles with us and for us. Jesus Christ torments and overcomes our tormenters. On the last day all the demons will be thrown into the abyss. They will be sealed there with Satan forever. No longer will they trouble God's people or God's creation. God's final victory is sure. All he asks is that we trust him. So renew your faith in Christ today. Let his work really take hold in you. All the changes he is bringing into your life and mine and into our world are not to be feared. They are blessings for our good. And when you sense Jesus overcoming the demons that torment you, do what Jesus told the healed man in the story to do. "Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you."