

What Has God Done for You?

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Gospel reading. **Jesus said, “Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.”** Here ends our text.

During Bible class one morning at St. Martin Lutheran church, the pastor passed out some index cards and pencils. He told his class, “I want you to write down three things that God has done for you. And be specific.” John thumbed the card and started by writing down 1, 2, and 3. And then he began to think. What *had* God done for him? Well, God had given him his house and clothes and car. But was that something *God* had done? After all, he had worked for those things. I guess God had freed him from the devil, but he couldn’t think of any specific examples of how. John looked over and noticed that the man next to him was writing furiously. He was writing on both sides of the card. Finally, being a good Lutheran, John wrote down the pat answers - forgiveness, life, and salvation – whatever that meant. Then he turned his card over.

The pastor asked if anyone would like to share their answers. John looked down and avoided eye contact. But the man next to him raised his hand. “I’d love to,” he said. He stood up and began, “Many of you don’t know me. I just moved here and took another job closer to family. But God *has* done great things for me. I really couldn’t limit my card to just three things. You see, as a young man, I was in great trouble. I started drinking and then experimented with narcotics. Then I got involved in the occult. All kinds of satanic rituals and sacrifices, prostitution, and sins of the flesh. I couldn’t hold a job of course. My mind was half fried by the drugs. I was trapped in a horrible life. I became homeless and lived under bridges. My clothes were just rags. I had hallucinations and heard voices in my head, telling me to do terrible things. At some point or other, I committed a crime and was arrested. I don’t even remember doing it, but there were witnesses. The defense attorney got me off on an insanity plea, and I was sentenced to an asylum. I was violent and sometimes they had to put me in a straight jacket so I wouldn’t harm myself or others. I was a lost cause.”

“But then I met this chaplain. He talked with me. He slowly took me through the Scriptures. He told me that God had created me, loved me, and given his own Son to die for all the terrible things I’d done. We met many times over a year. And through his words, I believed. The chaplain baptized me, and the voices in my head went away. I was no longer angry or violent. I was in my right mind again. A few years ago, I was released. I got a minimum wage job, a little apartment, and started going to church. And just last month I got a better job and moved back home. I’m taking care of my mother, who’s an invalid. My life has purpose again.”

“God has done so much for me. He’s given me my life. He’s given me my body and mind so I can work for the things I need like groceries and clothes. I’m no longer a burden on society but can actually help other people. I was lost and condemned, but Jesus redeemed me with his own blood. He’s taken my punishment for all the terrible things I’ve done. I’m freed from all those evil occult practices and horrible thoughts. Now I’m freed to serve him. And the Holy Spirit has even given me the faith to believe in him. I know my sins are forgiven. And even though I die in this life, he’s spared me from hell and given me eternal life. What has God done for me? He’s given me forgiveness, life, and salvation. I haven’t been worthy of any of it. It’s all God’s goodness and mercy.”

“And so everywhere I go, I tell other people what God has done for me. Sometimes I even go into the rougher neighborhoods and talk to people living on the street because I’ve been there. Some listen. Some scoff. But no one can argue with me about what God has done in my life. I thought about going into the ministry, but all the academics weren’t for me. I figure it’s best off if I stay right where I am, in my vocation or wherever I might be and just tell people what God has done for me.” The man sat down. Suddenly John thought of a lot more specifics he could’ve written on his card.

In our Gospel lesson this morning there was a man who was in great trouble. He lived, if you could call it living, in the country of the Gerasenes on the southeast side of the sea of Galilee. It wasn’t Jewish territory, but the land of Gentiles. This man was out of his mind for the devil controlled him. He was possessed by many demons. He wore no clothes. He had no home but lived in the graveyard among the tombs. He was always crying out like a madman and cutting himself with stones like a masochist. He was so fierce that no one could pass that way. People tried to bind him, but no one could subdue him. He had often been bound with shackles and chains so he wouldn’t hurt himself or others. But with unhuman strength he wrenched the chains apart and broke the shackles in pieces. He was a lost cause.

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But then he met Jesus. Jesus had come by boat across the sea of Galilee to this land of pagans ruled by Satan. And the first thing Jesus did was to come to this man who was out of his mind. He said, **“Come out of the man, you unclean spirit.”** The man fell down before him and cried out in a loud, demonic voice, **“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.”** Jesus asked him, **“What is your name?”** The man replied, **“My name is Legion, for we are many.”** The demons begged Jesus not to throw them into the abyss but to cast them into the herd of swine nearby. Jesus was merciful, even to these demons, at least for a time. He wouldn't cast them into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels until the Day of Judgment. He permitted their request. The demons came out of the man and entered the pigs. The whole herd rushed down the steep bank and were drowned in the sea. The destructive power that had been in this one man now destroyed over two thousand pigs.

The herdsmen were so afraid that they fled to the city and brought back a mob to see what had happened. They were surprised to see the man sitting at Jesus feet and talking with him. He was clothed and in his right mind. But the people were afraid. What kind of man was this Jesus? Chains couldn't control this madman, but Jesus could. Two thousand pigs destroyed. What other power would Jesus unleash upon them? They begged Jesus, kind of like the demons, to let them be and depart from them. Jesus permitted their request. He got back in the boat. But the man whom Jesus healed begged to be with him. He wanted to come with Jesus. But oddly, Jesus wouldn't permit this request. He was merciful to these people who wanted God to leave them. He left them one disciple. He told the man, **“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.”**

The man now had clothes and a home. He had his reason back. He had his life back. Instead of being a bane on society, he could be a blessing by helping people in his vocation. He had purpose. He was no longer controlled by the devil. Jesus had freed him. Now he was free to serve Christ. It wasn't anything he merited. It was all God's goodness and mercy. The man went throughout the whole city, proclaiming how much Jesus had done for him. The people maybe didn't look and act like madmen. They were upstanding citizens. But they were just as lost as he had been. They were condemned sinners, controlled by the devil, awaiting the fires of hell, just like those demons. I'm sure some people listened to this man. Some scoffed. But no one could argue with what Jesus had done for him.

Now maybe you might struggle sometime trying to think of specific things that God has done for you. After all, most of us don't have a testimonial that's as wild and gripping as the demoniac in the Gospel reading or a man who's been snatched from the clutches of the occult. We're upstanding citizens. We work hard. Most of what we have we could attribute to our own labors. Yeah, God has delivered us from sin, but we've never done anything that bad. Never been possessed by a demon or drooled like a madman. And eternal life sounds great as long as we don't get too bored. Ho-hum.

But we need to realize just what God has done for us. He's created us. He's given us our body and soul, our mind and reason with the ability to work for the things we need. He's provided everything we need to support this body and life so we actually need more storage to just to put it all. Everyday God protects us from harm. He guards us from the evil in the world and keeps at bay the devil and his demons who want to possess us. He's redeemed us through the suffering and death of his Son. Jesus took our punishment to spare us from the abyss, the fires of hell, a place even the demons shudder to think about. He's freed us from serving our sinful lusts and the desires of the devil so we're free to serve him by serving others. He gives our life purpose and joy. God sanctifies us. We were no different from the man possessed by demons or the crowds that feared God's power and wanted Jesus to leave. We were out of our minds and could never believe in a gracious God by our own reason or strength. We were a lost cause. But through baptism and his Word, the Holy Spirit gave you faith in God and his forgiveness. He put you in your right mind so you can sit at Jesus feet and understand his Word. Everyday he keeps you in the faith and everyday he forgives your sins through this same faith in Jesus Christ. On the Last Day God won't cast us away into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels. We get to go with him. We get to be with him forever.

What has God done for you? More things than you can write on an index card. We aren't worthy of it. We don't deserve it. It's all his goodness and mercy. And all he asks is that we return home and declare to others what he has done for us. You don't have to go to seminary to proclaim that. You can stay right where you are: in your vocation, in your station in life. Some may listen. Others will scoff. But no one can argue with what God has done for you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.