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Our Gospel account from the eleventh chapter of Luke parallels with the twelfth chapter of Matthew. Matthew records that the demon possessed man was blind and mute. Like Luke, he also records that people accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of the Satan. Both Matthew and Luke record Jesus talking about how a house divided against itself cannot stand. Both Matthew and Luke record Jesus' warning that when a demon is cast out of someone, then seven more evil spirits will return with that first one, and the second state of the man will be worse off than the first. There is a lot to unpack in this account. However, before we focus on Luke's account, I would like to draw your attention to something that Matthew records. I was recently asked the meaning of these words of Jesus by a member here at Trinity, and I want to explain them to everyone.

Matthew records our Lord saying that anyone who sins against the Son of Man will be forgiven of his sin, but anyone who sins or speaks a word against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. What is he referring to? First, we should take note that Jesus is pointing out what is going to happen. He, the Son of Man, is going to be handed over to the Romans and crucified. He is going to be mocked and mistreated, rejected and spoken against. He would willingly endure all of this at the hands of sinners in order to pay for their sins and the sins of all people. He would plead for their forgiveness from the cross. This is, after all, the purpose of his suffering and death. It is to reconcile God's enemies back to him, to take our sin and give in exchange his own righteousness. Many would reject Jesus. Many would speak against him. But he would rise from the dead, ascend into heaven, and then send his Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

It was on Pentecost when St. Peter would preach that powerful sermon, declaring that this Jesus, whom you crucified, God has established as both Lord and Christ. Many who had taken part in Christ's crucifixion would repent. They would hear the Word of God and believe it, trusting in the forgiveness of sins promised to them and their children through the gift of baptism and the continual preaching of the gospel. This is what the Holy Spirit came to do. He came to speak of Christ. He works through the gospel to create faith and keep us in the faith.

So this is the sin against the Holy Spirit. It is to reject his work of giving you faith. It is to refuse his Word, to speak against his Word, and to continue stubbornly in unbelief.

This is what Jesus is warning against. Those who fall into error out of ignorance and weakness but then are converted to Christ by the Holy Spirit – these will find forgiveness of their sins in the blood and righteousness of their Savior. But those who resist the Holy Spirit, scoff at his Word, and remain in their unbelief – the wrath of God will remain on them.

Now, it certainly happens that Christians fall away from the faith and then return later in life. But this is only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Though they resisted the Holy Spirit for a while, they were finally overcome by his gracious call to faith. This is a joyful thing, something for which we should thank God every day. I rejoice every time I hear my father-in-law tell me how he was brought back to the faith when he was in college. He had been baptized as a baby, fallen away in his teenage years, and then brought back in his early adulthood. May God be praised every day for this! Anyone who has a child who has fallen away should be bold to pray for him just as my wife's grandmother prayed for her boy.

But we should also take Jesus' warning seriously. Yes, it happens that people stop attending church and living a Christian life, but that God brings them back. Yet, we should not test the Lord, assuming people will return if we can only be more appealing to what they think they need. We shouldn't be slack in prayer. We shouldn't underestimate how deep, dark, and deceitful unbelief is. God says that he will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. It is not for us to judge hearts until the Lord comes and reveals the secrets of the heart. But we should judge according to what God's Word has already revealed. We should warn our loved ones who have fallen into lives of unbelief that the Holy Spirit will not be mocked. He is kind and patient, but it is a dangerous thing to continue resisting him. We should also take this warning seriously for ourselves. When God's Word says something that we don't understand or have a hard time swallowing, we should not shrug it off as unimportant. The Holy Spirit is always teaching us something through his Word. Perhaps you have a hard time with the teaching of hell. Well, join the club! Perhaps what the Bible says about marriage, chastity, and headship is difficult for you. That makes sense, since we live in a sinful world, which always opposes this teaching. But we should not deny what the Holy Spirit says just because we find it difficult. We should humble ourselves before his Word, trusting that he will help us grow in our understanding.

Now, let's return to our Lord's instruction in Luke's Gospel. He says that anyone who is not with him is against him, and anyone who does not gather with him scatters. There is no middle ground with Jesus. Those who refuse to gather with him are working for the devil. And Jesus isn't just talking about going to church, although this is obviously implied. To skip out on joining the saints in gathering around the Word and sacraments of Jesus is a terrible sin. But Jesus is speaking of something even deeper than just showing up to church. To gather with Jesus means that you stand on his Word. It means that you allow yourself to be spoken against and insulted for confessing his Word. It means that you don't pine after the world's approval. Instead, you make it your aim to please God, because you are confident that you are pleasing to him for the sake of Christ who suffered and died for you.

Gathering with Jesus also means that you seek unity in his church only through his Word. You don't compromise on the truth for the sake of some kind of outward peace. Those people who accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of the devil thought that Jesus was being divisive. They were focused on worldly peace, but Jesus was exposing the demons all around them. He was exposing the fact that they themselves are divided. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body, but the Sadducees denied the resurrection of the body or any kind of afterlife. Yet, they continued to put on a show of unity. These people who stood against Jesus were ignoring the fact that their own sons were disciples of Jesus, and they had cast out demons in his name. So Jesus point this out. If I cast out demons by Beelzebub, then how do your own sons cast out demons?

Their own houses were divided, but they just ignored it. If they were alive today they would have Thanksgiving Dinner together and be careful not to mention any controversial topics. I remember a woman complaining to me that the pastor talked about the promise and blessings of baptism at her wedding. She didn't believe that baptism saves, so she was offended that he talked about it. But what was the pastor supposed to do? Ignore the truth about baptism just

because she had issues with it? Some might say that this pastor was causing problems, being divisive, or maybe had a bad spirit. After all, it's her day, not his, right? Wrong! It's God's Day! It's Christ's Day! Those who don't want to hear his Word, those who prefer their own outward, worldly unity over the unity that only comes from the truth of Christ – they are not united. Their house is divided, and they can't stand. As Daniel says, they've been weighed in the balance, and they have been found wanting.

To desire outward unity at the expense of God's Word is to resist the Holy Spirit. It is to speak against him. Certainly, the Holy Spirit can overcome this resistance. He has done it with all of us. But Satan has designed your fall precisely by getting you to lose sight of God's Word.

Jesus cast out demons by the Finger of God. The Finger of God is the Holy Spirit who inscribed the Ten Commandments on stone tablets. And much more than this, he has inscribed and imprinted the image of Christ on your heart. When you were baptized, the Holy Spirit broke the devil's grip on you. Some Lutheran baptismal rites include the saying, "Depart, thou unclean spirit, and give room for the Holy Spirit." I have never said this in any baptisms, but I think I should. It's a good statement, and it teaches us what happens in baptism. Baptism is the washing in which the Holy Spirit gives us a new birth and new life in Christ. He frees us from the evil foe.

But how does baptism continue to work? How does baptism continue to save you and rescue you from the devil's power? It does this through the Word of God. After all, baptism is not simple water, but it is the water joined to God's Word. Jesus himself established it. His own finger, the Holy Spirit, continues to work through his same saving Word. This is why Jesus warns us about the seven other demons even more wicked than the first. People get baptized. They hear the Word for a while. But then they begin to grow tired of hearing what God has to say. They figure that they have their houses swept clean, but they are distracted by the pleasures of the world. They desire the approval of the world. And when they don't expect it, the evil spirit comes back with even more wicked spirits. They don't necessarily convulse and throw themselves into the fire. No, it is likely more sinister than that. Instead, they simply stay silent. They stop confessing the truth of their Savior. They are ashamed to talk about it. Or they don't like what God's Word says.

The devil tries to take the Word of God out of your heart, and he often does this by taking it out of your mouth. When your friend, your spouse, your coworker, your child, or whoever else speaks against God's Word, then the devil doesn't let you speak up to defend it. He keeps you silent. Perhaps it happens once that you don't speak up. Then it happens again, and again, and again. Before you know it, you are resisting the Holy Spirit, since the Word of God is not only absent from your lips. But it is absent from your heart as well.

Jesus says that you are blessed when you continue to hear the Word of God and keep it. When you treasure it, continuing to learn from it, take comfort in it, confess it, and find your strength from it, then you are blessed. We all pass through trials and temptations from the devil and his minions. We all experience the fear to speak up and the inability to find the words when Christ is under attack. But God is faithful. Jesus didn't die in vain. He rose from the dead. He gives you his Holy Spirit through his precious gospel so that you would know that you have peace

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with God and that the devil cannot harm you. So take refuge in his Word. You will not be put to shame. Let us pray:

Jesus, all your children cherish,
and keep them that they never perish
whom you have purchased with your blood.

Let new life to us be given
that we may look to you in heaven
whenever fearful is our mood.

Your Spirit on us pour
that we may love you more, hearts o'erflowing;
and then shall we, from sin set free,
sing praise through all eternity. Amen.