

The Power Of The Spirit  
Isaiah 65:1-9  
Psalm 22:19-28  
Galatians 3:23-29  
Luke 8:26-39

Rumi, a 13th-century Persian poet, jurist, scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic said, “Listen with ears of tolerance. See through eyes of compassion. Speak with the language of love.” On this Second Sunday after Pentecost, it is important for us to come to terms with the power of the Holy Spirit for everyday living. The power of the Holy Spirit gives us discernment to ascertain when evil is at work. We must engage the principalities and darkness in the world and in people’s lives with listening, tolerance, words of truth, love, and compassion.

*The Washington Post* ran a controversial op-ed piece titled, “As a psychiatrist, I diagnose mental illness. Also, I help spot demonic possession.” The date of publication is July 1, 2016. The subtitle read, “How a scientist learned to work with exorcists.” The author, Richard Gallagher, is a board-certified psychiatrist and a professor of clinical psychiatry at New York Medical College. Dr. Gallagher wrote:

For the past two-and-a-half decades and over several hundred consultations, I've helped clergy from multiple denominations and faiths to filter episodes of mental illness—which represent the overwhelming majority of cases—from, literally, the devil's work. It's an unlikely role for an academic physician, but I don't see these two aspects of my career in conflict. The same habits that shape what I do as a professor and psychiatrist—open-mindedness, respect for evidence and compassion for suffering people—led me to aid in the work of discerning attacks by what I believe are evil spirits and, just as critically, differentiating these extremely rare events from medical conditions. Is it possible to be a sophisticated psychiatrist and believe that evil spirits are, however seldom, assailing humans? Most of my scientific colleagues and friends say no, because of their frequent contact with patients who are deluded about demons, their general skepticism of the supernatural, and their commitment to employ only standard, peer-reviewed

treatments that do not potentially mislead (a definite risk) or harm vulnerable patients. But careful observation of the evidence presented to me in my career has led me to believe that certain extremely uncommon cases can be explained no other way.<sup>1</sup>

The op-ed piece generated nearly 3,000 comments, mostly from people whose worldview did not permit the reality of demon possession or even the existence of demons.

What is your worldview when it comes to the reality of demon possession and the existence of demons? Luke 8:38-39 reads, “The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ‘Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.’ So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.” The Bible in its entirety, speaks clearly about the existence of the Evil One and demons.

Our texts in Isaiah 65:1-9, Psalm 22:19-28, Galatians 3:23-29, and Luke 8:26-39 speak to living in the power of the Holy Spirit. God serves us and we in-turn serve others with this incredibly good news of God’s unconditional love. Love liberates followers of Jesus to live, in word and deed, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Denial inhibits followers of Jesus to live, in word and deed, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christopher J.H.

Wright writes,

[John] Stott expressed the conviction, which he sustained throughout his life, that Christian mission in obedience to the Great Commission could not be confined, in definition or in practice, to the verbal proclamation of the gospel (evangelism) alone, but that mission legitimately and biblically includes the practical involvement of Christians in society in the wide variety of good works that constitute social responsibility, service and action.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Gallagher, “As a psychiatrist, I diagnose mental illness. Also, I help spot demonic possession,” in *The Washington Post* (7-1-16).

<sup>2</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright in John Stott and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 41.

Isaiah 65:1-9 reminds us to call on God's name and not rely on our own devices. Isaiah 65:1-2 reads, "I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that did not call on my name. I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices..." The people rejected God. The people feel isolation from God. God feels isolation from the people yet remains faithful to them in unconditional love. God desires not to be alone but longs to be found.

Psalm 22:19-28 makes it clear that the wicked assert hatred on the people of God. Psalm 22:19-21 reads, "But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me."

Today is Juneteenth, a holiday that commemorates the June 19, 1865, announcement of the abolition of slavery in the United States. Hatred, among other acts of darkness, compelled the oppression of Black Americans to a life of being enslaved. The cries to God of the faithful engaged the despair and evil of slavery and liberation happened. But hate continues for people of color.

In Galatians 3:23-29, Paul instructs us that the Holy Spirit, not the law, is the ultimate source of individual and communal power that enables Christian living. Christian living in the Holy Spirit should not only produce profound thinking on the power of the Holy Spirit, but also transformation in feelings and actions. The law imprisons the experience of being a follower of Jesus. Galatians 3:23-24 reads, "Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be

justified by faith.” The redemptive work of Jesus rescued Gentiles from the necessity of becoming Jews and released Jews from a narrow view of the law.

And Luke 8:26-39 calls us to be encountered by Jesus and to be people who love others in such a way that they experience being encountered by Jesus. Jesus’ casting out the demons from the man demonstrates Jesus living in the power of the Holy Spirit confronting evil and darkness. Light for the demon possessed man led him to a new life of telling and doing the good news of salvation in Jesus to others. Again, hear and receive the words of Luke 8:38-39, “The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ‘Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.’ So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.” Jesus freed the demon possessed man from “legion” and the darkness of the principalities of this world.<sup>3</sup>

God serving us by the power of the Holy Spirit and we in turn serving others in the power of the Holy Spirit moves us from imagining darkness and evil being dispelled to experiencing it dispelled. Listen with ears of tolerance. See through eyes of compassion. Speak and do truth. Followers of Jesus have the power to be and do the things of God. Live in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)  
on Sunday, 19 June 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh at  
Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>3</sup>In the paragraphs of biblical interpretation above, I am grateful for the thinking and writing of Gregory L. Cuellar, C. Melissa Snarr, Donyelle McCray, Brad R. Braxton, Renata Furst, O. Wesley Allen Jr., and Stephen Boyd in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 88-90, 90-92, 99-96, 97-99, 99-101, 102-104, and 104-106.