If I had a decent singing voice I might have introduced today’s sermon with a little musical extravaganza from West Side Story. But since I don’t, there will be no multimedia extravaganza this morning and instead I will just read some of the lyrics from the song Officer Krupke:

Dear kindly Sergeant Krupke

You gotta understand

It's just our bringin' up-ke

That gets us out of hand

Our mothers all are junkies

Our fathers all are drunks

Golly Moses, naturally we're punks!

Gee, Officer Krupke, we're very upset;

We never had the love that every child oughta get

We ain't no delinquents

We're misunderstood

Deep down inside us there is good!

The song is a parody but to be a parody you have to parody something and in this case it is society’s relationship to evil. The members of the Jets are arguing that they are actually quite good it is just that there are circumstances quite outside of their control that have made them the way that they are and with the right types of intervention this goodness will come to the fore. Evil in this telling is not really evil it is just behaviors that have been caused by interactions with their fellow humanity and what logically follows from this assessment is that it can be cured by interaction with the right type of humanity. Everything in the equation is material and earthly. Cures may be medication, counseling, changing interaction with social media and so on. But at the end of the day the system is closed, evil is created by and cured by the stuff of this earthly pilgrimage. But this is not the explanation that we see today when Jesus and the disciples take a road trip to Gerasene. Once they get there we are told that they are met by a man who had demons. He does not have chemical imbalance or bad parents according to Luke but he is quite simply possessed by demons and all of his erratic and evil behavior is a direct result of this demonic possession. And this does not seem to be an opinion held exclusively by Luke because Jesus has a direct conversation with the demons that reside within this man. He then orders them out and they move over to some pigs and then lead the pigs to their death. And so this brings up a question that has plagued philosophers for generations and that is who is right: the Jets or Jesus? Is evil behavior because of our bringing up-ke or is it the result of forces that go beyond our earthly life? Are we possessed by demons or do we just need some Adderall? In my opinion its kind of complicated. Are there behaviors and psychological conditions that have been effectively treated through therapy or medications? Most certainly there are. But are there forces that transcend brain chemistry and the manner in which we frame our problems. That is true as well. I don’t think that the killing fields of Cambodia can be explained simply by saying Pol Pot needed to be held more as a child.

Episcopalians tend to pride themselves on being modern types of people not giving in to the superstitious sides of religion and so any discussion about demonic possession and demons in general can be a bit uncomfortable. And while I understand that every time your elbow hurts it is not necessarily a sign that Satan is on the prowl, I don’t think we can completely dismiss “the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God.” If that line sounds familiar it comes directly from the baptismal service. And so where I think we need to arrive is at the point where we realize that there are certainly mundane and pedestrian explanations for many of the things that go wrong in our lives there are forces of evil that go beyond our human explanations.

On July 8, 1714 the Longitude Act was passed by the British Parliament offering rewards for the individual or individuals who could come up with an accurate way of measuring longitude. The prize was £10,000 (roughly £1.48 million today) for accuracy within 1 degree (equivalent to 60 nautical miles, £15,000 (roughly £2.22 million today) for a method that could determine longitude within 40 minutes and £20,000 (roughly £2.96 million in 2020) for a method that could determine longitude within 30 minutes. As you may know the reason why this was such a big deal was that at this time sailors, in the middle of the ocean had no idea of where they were in terms of east west (i.e., their longitude). Much of the smart set believed the solution to this problem was in charting the stars. That is if you had the right charts you could look up at the heavens and see where the stars were, look at your chart and match it up to what you were seeing. This did not work for a few reasons. First the amount of knowledge and charts would be too great. Basically, you would need a chart for every area of the ocean for every time of the year. But fundamentally the problem was how when you don’t know where you are can you create a chart to say where you are. The solution was finally developed by a man named John Harrison who was a carpenter and a clock maker. He developed a clock that would work on a boat. The clock would be set to Greenwich mean time and then daily those on the ship could tell when it was noon. You would then contrast this with what time it was in Greenwich and know how far away you were. And all of this to day that I think much of our problem today with explaining thigs is that we are trying to make charts without knowing where we really are. We are trying to explain evil without having a fixed point by which to navigate. Knowledge can be a wonderful thing but it needs to be oriented. When we lose sight of God as pure goodness and those forces that rebel against God as the definition of evil we are adrift.