

Luke 8:26 Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. 28 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”— 29 for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) 30 Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. 31 They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Luke 8:32 Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33 Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

Luke 8:34 When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 35 Then people came out to see what

had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. 36 Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. 37 Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 “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.

MY NAME IS LEGION

Jesus asked, “What is your name?” And the man answered, “My name is Legion because there are many demons in my life.”

The man no longer has a name. Instead he is defined by the demons in his life. He is a prisoner of things beyond his control. His name is Legion.

Did you ever notice that sometimes our own lives are taken captive by those forces that seem to be above

and beyond us? We even allow ourselves to be named by those forces. For example, we say things like, “I’m so stupid. I’m so clumsy. I’m so afraid. I’m so impatient.”

I’m sure you have your own legion of names that you call yourself, but the point is this. We are controlled by those names.

Those names have the power to define who we are. Those names are “demons” that prevent us from being all that we could be in Christ Jesus. There are people within the sound of my voice who have allowed these demons to take over their life.

GIVING UP OUR DEMONS

And yet, in my experience we are often reluctant to give up our demons. Like the man in our story today we beg Jesus to leave us alone. We beg Jesus not to change us.

We might not be satisfied with our life, but when all is said and done we prefer the demons we know to the uncertainty of a whole new way of living. When we first meet Jesus it might not feel like salvation. As it was for the demoniac it might feel like torment.

But, Jesus loves us too much to leave us with our demons. Jesus tells us as he told a man long ago, “Let those demons go.” And Jesus does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He takes our demons away.

In our story for today the demons do leave. We know that they leave because they go into a herd of pigs. And the pigs go rushing headlong over a cliff into a lake and are drowned.

WHAT ABOUT THE PIGS?

It never fails. In my Bible studies on this passage people often seem more concerned about the pigs than they are the man who was filled with demons! They ask, “Who gave Jesus the right to destroy someone else’s private property?”

All I can say is that this concern is a rabbit trail (or in this case a swine trail) that would never have bothered a first century Jewish audience. Demons and unclean pigs were banished in one fell swoop. As far as they were concerned it was a win/win!

But, of course that was not how they looked at this miracle in Gentile country. Pig farming was big business. The pig herders told everyone who would

listen what Jesus had done. And so everyone from miles around came to see this prophet who was bad for business.

FREEDOM AND FEAR

And what did they see when they made their way to the seashore and found Jesus? They saw this man who used to be the town wacko sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to what Jesus had to say. He was clothed and in his right mind.

Did you notice their reaction to this sight? They were scared to death. They were terrified. Peterson translates, “They were in a state of panic.”

Now I could understand if they had been scared of this guy before the demons left him. He ran around buck naked and lived in the graveyard.

They tried to restrain this man, but they couldn't hold him.

Like an addict hopped up on PCP he would break his chains. And then he would be driven by his demons back into the wilderness. Come to think of it you could make a fairly decent horror movie just based

upon the few details that are given in our lesson for today.

But, now the horror show is over. The man is clothed and in his right mind. And the people are terrified.

Why are they so scared? They are afraid of the man who has the power to control demons that were obviously so powerful. They are afraid of Jesus, and they beg him to leave.

THE FEAR OF JESUS

Jesus does not always bring a sense of well-being and happiness. Quite often his presence brings a sense of uncertainty and fear. It was true not only for these Gentiles but also for the Jews and even for Jesus' own disciples.

In the story that precedes our lesson for today Jesus' disciples are threatened by a storm as they cross the Sea of Galilee. In fact they think that they're going to drown.

They wake up Jesus (who can apparently sleep through anything) and cry out for salvation. And Jesus stills the storm.

The Bible says that he “rebuked the wind and the raging water.” It’s the same word used when Jesus would heal someone from demon possession. And how do the disciples respond to their deliverance?

The Bible tells us that they respond with fear. They are terrified. They ask, “Who is this guy? Who has the power to command the wind and the waves?”

Apparently the power of God’s salvation as revealed in Jesus is a two-edged sword. You are not only saved from what threatens you, but you are also threatened by what saves you.

That’s why the Gerasenes begged Jesus to leave. He was upsetting their way of life. His intervention in the life of this one demon possessed man had broader implications, and that scared them to death.

That’s why many of us also find Jesus so disturbing. When you meet Jesus everything changes. The demons are named and cast out.

FEAR OF CHANGE

And that means it is no longer possible for us to live in the same old way. It is no longer possible for us to

keep on herding pigs when Jesus comes into our life. We are called to do something else.

There is a parable about a farmer who had a few animals he kept in a barn that had gotten old, drafty, and leaky. Concerned for his animals' wellbeing, the farmer decided to build a new barn. He built a fine new barn, tore down the old one, and was comforted to know his animals were now safe and dry.

One day a storm came through the area. The farmer decided to look in on his animals, and he was shocked to discover that the barn door had been left unlatched, and all of the animals had left the new barn and were huddled beneath the storm within the foundations of the old, familiar barn.

It is easier to hold on to what we know than to face the new.

The Gerasenes are given the opportunity to try something new. They must choose between fear and faith.

And they choose fear.

But, don't be too hard on them for making that choice. The disciples made the same choice when the storm raged on the Sea of Galilee. (See Luke 8:25)

And we often make the same choice as well. When the storms rage we do not have the faith to wait on Jesus. Instead, we insist on returning to the familiar confines of our old leaky and inadequate barn. Out of fear we send Jesus away and try to muddle through on our own.

But, the fact of the matter is this; we can't do it on our own. We don't have the power to control the wind and the waves. We don't have the power to evict the demons that have taken up residence in our life.

Only Jesus can do that.

ONE HEALING CHANGES A COMMUNITY

Notice that Jesus does not resist the pleas of the Gerasenes. When they beg him to leave Jesus gets in the boat and prepares to sail away.

But, there is one person who doesn't want Jesus to go. It is the man who was freed from his demons.

He begs Jesus to let him get in the boat and cross over to the other side with him.

And Jesus tells him,
“No, you stay. Go back home and tell people what God has done for you.”

It’s ironic. The man goes back home and tells the very people who tried to keep him chained up about the freeing grace of God.

The Gerasenes tell Jesus to leave, but even after Jesus leaves the effects of his ministry remain.

You see this story is about more than just the healing of one man. It is about how the salvation of Jesus can change a whole community. When the demons leave one man others are also changed by the story.

A pastor was visiting the Holy Land. He crossed the Sea of Galilee and came to place where the Gerasenes used to live. He said that in that place was an ancient church. And he had to wonder,

“Did that church exist because long ago a man told others that Jesus had delivered him from his demons?”

I think the pastor was on the right track. That church did exist because of the Gerasene demoniac's witness.

But, not only that church.

Every church owes its existence to the testimony, the witness of those who have been saved by Jesus.

When God delivers us from our demons it changes not only our lives but also the lives of those around us. It creates a new community that is open to the possibility of God's miraculous deliverance. It creates a new community that dares to live by faith and grace.

One commentator spoke of the levels of uncleanness in our story for today. The story takes place in an unclean land, the land of the Gentiles.

And the one who is healed by Jesus is the most unclean person in an unclean land ... a crazy person who lives among the tombs and threatens all that come near him.

And yet God in Christ can make the most unclean person we can imagine clean. God in Christ can deliver those possessed by even the strongest demons.

DELIVERANCE TODAY

Some of you are here today because this is true. You know what it means to be down on your luck, out of control and out of hope.

But, Jesus in some way changed all of that. Jesus in some way persuaded the demons in your life to leave, and that's why you're here today.

You have a powerful story to tell. You are a witness of resurrection power. What happened to you not only has the power to change your life; it also has the power to change the lives of others. You need to tell that story.

And some of you here today because you think that the demons are winning, and you desperately want to be saved. Your name is Legion because there are many demons in your life. Life has become a horror story that seems to have no end.

Jesus tells you to let those demons go.

Jesus tells you to quit herding swine and start fishing for men and women. Jesus tells you that the one who

commands the wind and the waves is powerful enough to calm the waters in your life.

Or, as the Apostle Paul put it, “If God is for us, who can be against us.”

NAME THE DEMONS

The first step in salvation is being willing to name the demons in your life. That’s what a lot of folks do every Tuesday at this church. “My name is ... and I am an alcoholic.”

It takes courage and faith to name the demon and admit that there is a problem in our life that we can’t deal with. It takes courage and faith to say that our life is out of control and only God can put it right again.

But, that kind of truth telling is necessary if we are to be saved.

It is painful to say frankly that our lives are filled with demons. But, in that hard truth there is freedom.

Evil only has power when it operates in the darkness. Once the evil is named, it can be evicted. When you shine light on evil, it runs away.

How did Jesus put it? You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THAT WAY

The noted author, John Killinger, tells a story about a man who is alone in a hotel room in Canada. He is in a state of deep depression. In fact he is so depressed that he can't even bring himself to go downstairs to the restaurant to eat.

He is a powerful man, the chairman of a large shipping company but at this moment, he is absolutely overwhelmed by the pressures and demands of life... and he lies there on a lonely hotel bed far from home wallowing in self-pity.

All of his life, he has been a difficult and demanding person, worrying about everything, anxious and fretful, always fussing and stewing over every detail. And now, at mid-life, his anxiety has gotten the best of him, even to the extent that it is difficult for him to sleep and to eat.

He worries and broods and agonizes about everything, his business, his investments, his decisions, his family, his health, even, his dogs.

Then, on this day in this Canadian hotel, he craters. He hits bottom.

Filled with anxiety, completely immobilized, paralyzed by his emotional despair, unable to leave his room, lying on his bed, he moans out loud: “Life isn’t worth living this way, I wish I were dead!”

And then, he wonders, what God would think if he heard him talking this way. Speaking aloud again he says, “God, it’s a joke, isn’t it? Life is nothing but a joke.”

Suddenly, it occurs to the man that this is the first time he’s talked to God since he was a little boy. He is silent for a moment and then he begins to pray. He describes it like this:

“I just talked out loud about what a mess my life was in and how tired I was and how much I wanted things to be different in my life.

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 talked to his wife about what happened. He talked to his brother who is a minister

and asked him:

“Do you think it was God speaking to me?”

The brother said: “Of course, because that is the message of God to you and every one of us. That’s the message of the Bible. That’s why 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 his brother and said, “You were right. It has really happened. I’ve done it. I’ve had a rebirth. I’m a new man. Christ has turned it around for me.”

Killinger said that the man is still prone to anxiety. He still has to work hard. But, now he has a source of strength. During the week, he often leaves his work desk and goes to the 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 that hotel room in Canada and how depressed and lonely and lost I felt and I hear that voice saying: It doesn’t have to be that way.”

Do you have a legion of problems in your life? Do you fuss and fume about everything? Do the demons in your life threaten to overwhelm you?

Are you isolated from the ones you love because of your fears? Have you even wondered if life is worth living?

Jesus comes to tell you that it “doesn’t have to be that way.” No matter how many demons are in your life, you are not beyond saving.

God give us the courage and the faith to believe.
God help us to let our demons go.

Amen.