

## Discipleship in the Lectionary – 06/19/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, June 19<sup>th</sup>

Luke 8:26-39

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

### Got demons?

Following Pentecost, the Liturgical Year enters Ordinary Time through to Advent. After Trinity Sunday last week, the lectionary reverts to Luke for the Gospel text. The lection for this Sunday is Luke's version of the Gerasene Demoniac - a man plagued by a legion of demons. It is through this story that we can be strengthened to confront the fear and demons in our own lives so that we too may carry out Christ's purpose in our lives.

#### Luke 8:26-39

The lead-in to this text (8:22-25) begins, "*One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake..."*" Jesus decides to cross the Sea of Galilee to the Gentile Decapolis area (Ten Cities). As they made their way across this lowest freshwater lake on earth, a mighty windstorm came down upon the water and the boat was in danger of sinking. Owing to the topography, such storms were a common and frightening occurrence. In their fear the disciples wake the sleeping Jesus who rebukes the wind and raging waves then rebukes his disciples for their lack of faith. The disciples were now both afraid and amazed, asking one another who is this Jesus that commands even the winds and the water.

*<sup>26</sup> Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup> When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. <sup>28</sup> When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." <sup>29</sup> For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time 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 desert.)*

The opening verse reveals the location of this event. There seems to be some disagreement between the synoptics over the precise location. In any case, the incident occurs near a small town by the Sea on the opposite shore from Galilee. The text gives the impression that immediately Jesus stepped onto the shore He was met by a man who had demons. The sorry state of the man is described in the text. The man's demons were a threat to himself and his neighbors. He was chained for his own good and their good but would break his bonds. This man was forced to live outside of mainstream society, naked and among the tombs. He was, in effect, the living dead (vv. 27,29).

If Jesus' own disciples were questioning His identity, the demoniac knows exactly who Jesus is and proclaims Him as the *Son of the Most High God*. This illustrates how knowledge and understanding of Jesus alone is not sufficient for salvation (James 2:19).

<sup>30</sup> *Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him.*

<sup>31</sup> *And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.* <sup>32</sup> *Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission.*

<sup>33</sup> *Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.*

The power of Jesus over the "unclean spirit" is evident given the posture of the demoniac in v.28 and v.30f. Jesus determines the man is possessed by many demons (there were approx. six thousand men in a Roman Legion). This is the only time where demons apparently negotiate with Jesus and He gives them permission to enter a herd of pigs nearby on the hillside. Mark's account numbers the herd at about two thousand (Mark 5:13). The herd then stampedes into the lake and the pigs drown. The presence of pigs confirms this is predominantly a Gentile area and it is reasonable to conclude the demoniac was a Gentile.

<sup>34</sup> *When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country.* <sup>35</sup> *Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and 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.* <sup>36</sup> *And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed.* <sup>37</sup> *Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned.* <sup>38</sup> *The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying,* <sup>39</sup> *"Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.*

Not surprisingly, the now unemployed herdsmen flee and tell of this event which draws people out to see for themselves what had happened. The man formerly not fit to interact with society is now at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. Not surprisingly, the crowd and the man from whom the demons had gone have different reactions. Not some but "*all of the people of the surrounding country*" ask Jesus to leave for they were overcome by fear. This event was frightening from both the perspective of a supernatural occurrence as well as from the perspective of being a disaster to the local economy. What else would this man do? We can't afford any more miracles! The man who Jesus healed has the complete opposite reaction. He begs to go with Jesus, but Jesus calls him to another purpose - to return home and declare what *God* has done for him. We read how the man proclaimed what *Jesus* had done for him. Luke indicates here how the man Jesus saved believes Jesus has the same status as God.

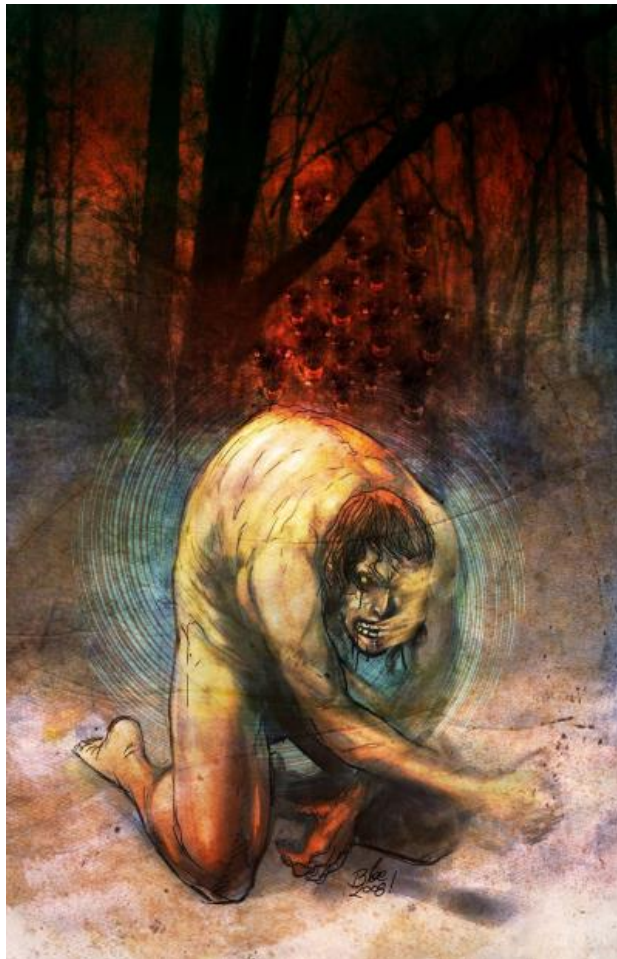
### Reflections

This story of the Gerasene demoniac illustrates the fear that Jesus' disciples must have had to confront as they followed Jesus. First, they almost drowned in a fearsome tempest for which the Sea of Galilee is notorious for. The fisherman among them would have known these waters intimately. Perhaps such tempests were their greatest fears. Second, when they make it to land, they knew they were in Gentile territory - for them this was a place that was alien and hostile. This was a place they would not have gone to on their own. Third, after barely surviving being drowned they were immediately confronted by the horrific spectacle of the demoniac. While for those of us raised on a steady diet of zombie movies, the demoniac's appearance alone may not seem too intimidating. Yet imagine how those zombie-naïve disciples must have felt when they saw him, especially with the moaning and

groaning during the exorcism. Fourth, the sight of two thousand pigs stampeding off a cliff. As someone familiar with what a handful of pigs can do after having farmed pigs on a homestead, the sheer thought of two thousand pigs in a stampede is almost impossible to imagine. The ground must have shaken. Despite all of this, the disciples overcame their fear and continued to follow Jesus.

When it comes to fear, we perhaps overlook the man that Jesus cured in this story. Imagine his fear and disappointment. He wanted to go with Jesus, but he was sent back to his village to tell the story. He would be blamed for the loss of the village's livelihood. He was sent back to a life where he would always be looked on with suspicion. He would likely never marry - What does your husband do Mrs. Smith? Nothing right now, he used to be possessed by demons and live among the tombs but he's between jobs at the moment... But he responded to his savior's call. Sometimes we are called to go (or remain) in a place we would not choose on our own. When we are called to ministry it is not our own idea!

As modern-day disciples, we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit to overcome our fears as we walk with Jesus in our world. Like the world today, the villagers preferred Jesus to leave them alone. The Gospel is first bad news before it is Good News! Just like Jesus and the demoniac, we are called to keep our divine appointments that are placed in our path. While we may not come across someone who is possessed by a legion of demons, there are plenty of other demons plaguing people that we run into as we go about our lives. Many of these people are also considered dead by their families. Jesus can heal and save these too.



For feedback or to be added or removed from the mailing list, please e-mail [david.r.lyons@gmail.com](mailto:david.r.lyons@gmail.com)