

Sermon June 19, 2022

Today we heard the story of Jesus crossing a lake to the territory of the Gerasenes, who are gentiles—which means he, as a Hebrew, has essentially entered enemy territory. We don't know why he went there, but almost immediately; he's involved in drama.

There's a naked crazy guy, chatty demons, charging pigs doing swan dives, tombs, chains, shackles, freaked-out locals, and a small riot. And all in gentile territory.

The tormented man called Legion is isolated in the tombs on the hillside. He had, what we would call a mental illness—but at the time was understood to be demon possession. He was bound in chains, and everyone wanted him out of the way.

Enter Jesus—who heals the man by first approaching and accepting him. He establishes a relationship with Legion, breaking through the years of rejection and imprisonment. In a matter of minutes, the man's torture has ended. His shackles are removed, and he is given clothing.

Now you would think the Gerasenes in that region would be lining up along the road shouting "ALLELUIAS." "But no, they were afraid. In fact, so afraid that they asked this prophet from Nazareth, to quietly leave their little community, essentially saying, "Don't call us, we'll call you."

So, aside from the kamikaze swine—a story which must've delighted the Jews---what is the point of this gospel?

I think it's partly about relationship. Jesus meets the man where he is—showing compassion instead of fear or anger.

But I think the main point is really about power – all sorts of power. This account is part of Luke's run-up to the big question Jesus asks his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" In fact, this story hints at what the answer is; ----so it's not so much about what Jesus did, as about who he is.

And who Jesus is-- has to do with his power. It also has to do with --- of all the powers in the universe--- which power will have the last word.

There are a lot of powers out there, powers that can, and do-- hurt and isolate--- and torment – in all sorts of ways. The categories we use to describe them don't really matter that much. Whether we live in a world full of demons or schizophrenics, of storm-gods or indifferent natural laws, of legitimate governments or paramilitaries – regardless of the categories we use, we live in a dangerous world, a frightening world, a world that seems to be pretty much against us. We live in a world that doesn't seem to care about us or our pain.

And the story of the Gerasene demoniac, like so many stories about what Jesus did, and about who Jesus is, are ways of saying that all of those powers out there, regardless of how we name them or organize them, of how real they are, or how awful they are – none of them is the ultimate power, --- none of them has or will have the last word.

The power that Jesus brings, the power of love, --- the power we see on the cross, ---- that power will prevail.

And this victory is ours by gift and by grace.

The Gerasene demoniac had more to worry about than his demons. He was cut off from his family, friends, community, relationships – from all those connections that together weave the fabric of our humanity. His isolation was and is--- victory for the destructive powers.

Still, by the time Jesus got through with him, our demoniac was on the other side of those as well. He was in his right mind, and Jesus told him to go to his home, a home he did not have when our story began. He was given the fullness and wholeness of his life back.

This is part of what Paul is talking about when he insists that, in Christ, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female.” Paul is saying that these distinctions, these powers of the social, economic, ecclesiastical, and political structures – as ancient, hallowed, destructive, and potent, as they are – these powers too--will fall before Jesus.

And it is our job to oppose these powers, and by God's grace they should not separate, --- isolate, ---- define, --- or destroy us.

Our job is to live in relationship. We are called to love the expanses between all of us, and to see ourselves and all of God's children as whole, and complete and we are to gather together.

Because the love that Jesus is, and the love that Jesus brings, is stronger than anything, even the worst, the very worst, that the world can throw at us. That's who Jesus is – that's what these stories are all about, that's the “big truth,” regardless of the categories and the worldviews we use to talk about them.

And that is good news.