

Sabbath Sermon

Luke 8:26-39

Jesus casts out demons possessing a man of the Gerasenes

Bishop Laura Barbins

The sermon today centers on the gospel according to Luke, the 8th chapter.

²⁶ They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, ^[b] which is across the lake from Galilee. ²⁷ When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” ²⁹ For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

³⁰ Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. ³¹ And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

³² A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. ³³ When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴ When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, ³⁵ and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ³⁶ Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. ³⁷ Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ “Return home and tell how much God has done for

you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Sermon

(At the beginning of the sermon, please acknowledge that this sermon was written by Bishop Laura Barbins.)

Such an interesting story, this story of the Gersaene demoniac. It is a picture of contrasts. A solitary man and a legion of demons. A bunch of pigs and a bunch of townspeople. Dry rocks and a body of water. Crazy, frenetic pigs and demons – and a calm man who is in his right mind.

And in the middle of the whole thing is Christ.

Over the past 2 years fear is something that we have come to expect. It seems like a “normal” reaction these days. Fear is pervasive.

And, it is indeed something that makes sense. When an elementary school and a grocery store get shot up – fear seems like a perfectly correct way to be. When “numbers go up” it seems reasonable to be afraid that another Omicron is coming. When the weather predicts storms, fear of tornados or floods is natural. There are certainly plenty of things to be afraid of in our world. But even in the church these days we have fears! We could name so many: racism, gender bias, hateful words and actions, homo-phobia. The list of things to be afraid of

And then, in our individual congregations the fears get even closer to some of us: Will we recover from our shutdowns? Will we be able to keep doing ministry? Will we be able to stay open?

I recently had someone, when I asked them how they were after a traumatic event, respond, “I am responding within the normal array of emotions.” In other words, it was a reasonable reaction to an event.

I think that the demoniac, too, was having a reasonable reaction! He was possessed by a bunch of demons – so nakedness and living in a graveyard seems reasonable. The demons saw Jesus coming – the one who had been casting demons out all over the place – and they get nervous about where they are going to get sent! And I don’t know about you, but if a guy came to town and healed the town drunk with the touch of a hand, I might be a little afraid as well!

Yes. Fear is something we understand.

Can we take a look at this story again, though? Look closely:
There is a sense of swirling activity in this story –
I get the sense of a man leaping and shouting among the graves.
I see a legion of demons swirling inside his head.
There are pigs running around a hillside and then over.
When the townspeople hear about it – I see a mob running toward the
graveyard. Do they have pitchforks and clubs... part of me thinks yes. Fear is
funny, after all.

There is one character in the story who seems to be standing still – standing
calmly – radiating a sense of peace.
Jesus.

A few things to notice:

Jesus didn't avoid the chaos of the moment. Jesus stepped out of the
comfort of his boat and into the swirling moments of the world.
Jesus doesn't stand aloof and far back. He engages the chaos of the demons. He
addresses the fear that is in the story: What is your name.

Jesus shows compassion – not just to the man who is possessed, but also to
the demons! They don't want to go into the abyss... so he grants them to go out
into the pigs!

But perhaps most profoundly, Jesus takes a seat so that the formerly
demon possessed man can sit at his feet. Jesus sits down. Among the mess. In the
midst of the fear. Jesus shows up and sits down.

Luke tells us that the townspeople “found the man from whom the demons
had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet – and this implies that the guy is listening to
Jesus. That Jesus is teaching him something. That Jesus has good and gracious
words for him – and he is listening.

My dear friends – Jesus is still showing up in the midst of fearful times. Still
showing up in the midst of chaos. Still showing up and standing still, offering
words of comfort and freedom. Jesus is present!

Now... I know where most sermons jump to – where I have jumped in my
sermons over the years:

“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.’ So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.”

But I don’t want us to rush to that right now. Yes, eventually we need to get there. But what did this man-who-was-formerly-demon-possessed do right away? He stopped what he was doing, he sat down at the feet of Jesus, and he listened. He listened. He soaked up the presence of Christ. He didn’t jump to action, he sat to listen.

My dear people of God – we so often jump over this. So, in these weeks of a Synod wide Sabbatical, I invite you to sit and listen to Jesus. Sit at the feet of Christ. Soak of the peace the God gives us. Be in prayer with one another. Look around to see what wonders God is bringing forth in the world. Let the calm presence of Christ still the chaos that is swarming. And quell the fear that is ours. Sit at the feet of Christ. Center yourselves on the presence of Jesus in your midst. Because then, and only then, will we hear where it is that Christ wants us to go.

May God continue to bless your lives and your congregations.