

Sermon ☩ June 19, 2022

Luke 8:26-39

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The average Bible reader of our day is inclined to shy away from the passage of Scripture just read. And understandably so, for it is couched in figures and modes of expression no longer current. There's this whole demon reference. Come on, we don't believe that stuff anymore . . . do we? So this passage isn't really relevant for our present day and way of living . . . right?

Well . . . let's talk about this for a couple of minutes.

Of course, belief in demons as the source and explanation of manifold evils has been a universal trait of all humankind. Historically, the wise old philosophers and the common peasants were exactly alike. The Christian Church simply inherited the explanations. Demons for the ancients not only caused accidents and our body's maladies, but also nature's phenomena. The very church bells were used not only to summon people to worship, but also to drive the devils from the thunder clouds. Insanity, individual wickedness, blindness, the power of evil emperors, epilepsy, and every form of personality disorder were all attributed to demons.

Whatever people meant by the phenomenon of demon possession is still with us. We lose our tempers, become insanely jealous, have accidents on the highways, and are victims of a host of mental disturbances. The ancients had their Neros and Caligulas; we have our Hitlers and Saddam Husseins.

So we are presented with this Biblical account of this homeless, naked man living in the tombs on the edge of the city.

We can only guess at the poor man's illness. Evidently, he has been chained up, either for his own protection or that of the public. But he has broken loose and set up his abode in what is identified on the maps as a desert or wilderness—a place of the tombs, which would indicate it was an ancient burial ground. His clothing has long since been worn or torn to shreds, and he is naked.

When Jesus comes upon him he asks, "*What is your name?*"

"My name? Do you mean who am I? I don't have a name in the sense in which you mean. My name is Legion!", he says . . . that is to say, "*I don't know who I am anymore.*"

He is in the grip of warring forces in his personality that are tearing him to pieces and competing for mastery in his life . . . what psychologists would call "inner conflicts." And so Jesus heals the man.

About the time the man was cured, a herd of hogs were frightened and apparently ran over a cliff into the sea and were destroyed. But when the people saw the man healed and the hogs destroyed, they put two and two together and Jesus was blamed.

The evil spirit that Jesus took from the man must have gone into the hogs and made them commit suicide.

At this point the scripture is eloquent: *“Then the 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.”*

Not one word of rejoicing for the good fortune of the man, or what his healing might mean to those who loved him. They could think only of those crazy hogs. This Jesus was bad for business. The local chamber of commerce saw the light and asked him to leave, and they had popular support. *“The people of the surrounding country . . . asked him to depart from them; for they were seized with great fear.”*

And that was all right with Jesus, for he never forced himself upon anyone. You would not find him putting his foot in a door to hold it open until he could make his sales pitch. He enters by invitation only.

And how about the man he had healed? Listen to the words: *“The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him [that is, with Jesus]; but he sent him away, saying, ‘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.”*

This story undergirds all that the Church has to say about this thing we call missions—both in motive and scope. It’s about sharing God’s love; it’s about doing for others. We’ve all got demons that keep us from doing what God would have us do . . . but when we are able to set these demons aside . . . our lives can be changed . . . transformed.

St. Luke’s has been profoundly blessed by the generosity and goodwill of others. Most recently the large bequest from Sara Wright was added to our legacy funds. Each year, a certain percentage of these funds are earmarked for mission. Last month, the members of our Outreach Committee met to discuss ways in which we could share God’s love. A few weeks ago, \$1,000 checks were sent to the a number of organizations . . . local, national and international.

Allow me to take a few minutes to let you know how St. Luke’s is sharing God’s love.

Locally, we sent checks to the Northern Door Children’s Center, Door County Housing Project, Relay for Life, Secret Santa, the Door of Life Food Pantry and Door County Habitat for Humanity.

Internationally, we support Episcopal Migration Services to assist with the refugee crisis in Ukraine.

We sent money to Pillars Shelter in Appleton. As their website states, *From homelessness to coming home, Pillars provides shelter, support, and solutions to address the housing needs in our community.*

We also support The Fuller Center for Housing in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Millard Fuller was the founder of Habitat for Humanity. After his work with Habitat, he and his wife started this housing initiative in Clarksdale.

And finally, we continue to support Tricklebee Café in Milwaukee. Tricklebee is a ministry of the Moravian Church and is run by Pastor Christie Melby-Gibbons. It is a pay-what-you-can community café that offers healthy meals, food-service training, & spiritual nourishment.

Okay, you may still be thinking that it is a stretch to first talk about the naked guy living in the cemetery and then listing all of the great ministries that St. Luke's is supporting.

But the two go hand in hand. All of the organizations and ministries that we support ultimately help people regain a sense of self-worth and dignity. It is exactly the aid that Jesus provided to the man in the cemetery.

My own life has been transformed by the work that I have done with Habitat for Humanity over the years: in San Antonio, Texas; in New Orleans for three summers following Katrina and then three summers building on the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Huntington, West Virginia.

We, who have so much, are humbled by the determination of those who have so much less. We can stand idly by and watch it all happen or we can become engaged in mission.

Given what God has already done for us, how can we not respond. As always . . . we thank you for your support.

And this night . . . and for hundreds of nights yet to come . . . as those we have assisted sleep in the safety and comfort of their new homes . . . the blessing will be passed along.