

## **Luke 8:26-39**

<sup>26</sup>Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>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"— <sup>29</sup>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.) <sup>30</sup>Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. <sup>31</sup>They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>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. <sup>34</sup>When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. <sup>37</sup>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. <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." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

He "had demons". Luke does not spend a lot of time setting up a story. When Luke tells us how Jesus solved a problem, he is straightforward about what the problem is. Luke is where we find such uncomplicated descriptions as "Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever" (4:38), "There was a man who had dropsy" (14:2) and, about

Zacchaeus, “He was a chief tax collector and was rich” (19:2). The nature of the problem is not the point of Luke’s gospel. The point is that Jesus can fix it. So, that is where Luke spends his time. This morning, Luke tells us the man had demons.

Normally this is an admirable writing style, but in this case it raises an obstacle between us modern-day listeners and this story of Jesus’ ministry. It is hard to think of demon-possession as having much to do with our lives. I do not know of anyone who is concerned about being possessed by demons themselves and only a very few who are willing to accuse others of having the problem. So, the first thing we should do with this story is assure ourselves that Luke has something to say to us, today. Do not let this story put on horns and a forked tail to disguise itself as irrelevant.

This story knows us well.

FIRST) Jesus asks *the* (singular) demon its name and *they* answered, “legion”. There were a lot of them. How many times have you said you had a hard day and you were asked “What went wrong?” – with the naïve expectation that you were going to give *one* answer? Our lives are filled with distractions, anxieties, annoyances, and demands – but it is rare to have one thing that so overwhelms everything else that we would have the luxury of a one word answer to give some handy exorcist.

The man in the Gospel lesson had a life that was out of control and that fact – that he does not have *one* name to give to his problem – does not make the picture any rosier. Even we, who call Jesus Lord, are possessed by a demon whose name is legion.

Employment, communicating with your family, health, schedule, the things people expect of you,

Perhaps this story does relate to our lives.

SECOND) It is the man with the demons who recognized that Jesus was God. He did not ask Jesus, “Who are you?” He asked Jesus, “What are you going to do with me?”

They recognized who Jesus was but their concern was for self-preservation. The demons started negotiating with Jesus and suggested that they could have a reduced life-style living in some nearby pigs. It turns out that the pigs resulted in their destruction but the demons gave it a try.

How often we try to negotiate our way to a compromised salvation. If we were completely in the presence of Jesus Christ and tried to live as God's creation – the change might be too much. Couldn't we just turn the demons down a bit? We won't get rid of them completely – we'll just keep them nearby and be less noticeable. To think of the good of the community beyond our own homes, to want to learn more than to be entertained, to be consistent with our listening, and generous with our money, and determined with our energy ... that might make our lives unrecognizable. We read this morning about a case where a man was desperate to keep his life familiar – even if it was the life of an outcast living among the tombs. So the demons negotiated for their lives. Couldn't they stay nearby, perhaps in a herd of pigs? At least we could survive. Jesus said, "Sure, see how that works out for you."

God made us to live with him. A reduced, compromised life is less than God created us for.

The demons were looking for sanctuary from holiness and it destroyed them.

THIRD) When the locals came to see what all the fuss was about they found the man sitting at Jesus' feet. This is the quietest we have seen him so far in the story. He was far more active when he was possessed – from which we might learn that not all activity is wholesome. A lot of activity might be reacting to demons within, resisting change, trying to stay safe in things that are destructive, but familiar.

Luke tells us that the "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.*” They were not afraid of him when he was possessed by demons; they knew how to deal with him. They chained him up or made him live outside of town. Now the man lived under the authority of Jesus and his neighbors were afraid.

The demons accepted the authority of God in Jesus Christ and the Gerasenes did not. Neighborhoods have not changed much over the years. I think we can scare our neighbors faster talking about the power of God than we can by complaining about our families or making poorly informed statements about our other people. We have come to expect gossip, greed, and other symptoms of demon possession. People are used to that kind of behavior and they know how to deal with it – just as the Gerasenes knew how to deal with the man who lived out in the tombs. On the other hand, an excessive amount of religion might make our neighbors nervous. The Gerasenes were more afraid of the Son of God than they had been of the demons that had harassed the man so terribly.

Change can be a frightening thing.

Here was a man they had know for a long time and the demons were not only gone, they were destroyed. He was in the presence of Jesus Christ and his life was transformed. He could look to the future with hope and the promise of a life with God.

So, the neighbors asked Jesus to leave. “Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear.”

The people were willing to do without any opportunity to be led by Jesus. Jesus changed things.

I have been trying to make the case that this story Luke tells us this morning is relevant to our lives today. First, there were lots of demons, too many to name. The man was plagued by a lot of things at once. Second, the demons recognized that Jesus was God, but they did not want to change. They wanted to survive. The things that separate

us from God try to preserve themselves. They want to survive. Third, the neighbors were more afraid of change than they had been afraid of demons.

Now, at the end, the story sounds most familiar of all.

“The man from who the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ‘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.”

You know the love of God and the power of God. God makes your life deeper and more profound. If you could just get on the boat with Jesus and get away from all of the familiar surroundings and the people who have seen you at your absolute worst.

(Remember, up until that day the man had been possessed by demons. Do you think he is going to get a lot of invitations?) The man wanted a new start, alone, with Jesus. It does sound attractive.

Jesus said, “no”. “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” Not only has God given you a mission to live and a message to share. God has given you a place to live your mission and a place to share your message. Your home seems like an awfully familiar setting for a new start. The people you know best are the least likely to be convinced that you are a new person with fresh ideas. But this is where God has placed us. The people we see at our daily routine are the people who depend the most upon our faithfulness. The surroundings we know best are where we can make the most difference. The faces we see in our homes are the ones who need to know what God has done for you.

Jesus’ instructions are the same today as they were back then. “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.”

1) The love of God can give us *one* saving grace, in the face of dozens of demons. 2) It is the demons of our lives that try to preserve themselves – not a genuine hope for a better life. A life with God will mean change. 3) Our world is more concerned about change than it is concerned about evil. When we live to be a part of change, we should not expect the world will make us welcome. 4) We are to live our changed lives in the familiar surroundings that God has given us. This is where our lives have meaning, where we know how to make a difference, and where our loved ones are. We are surrounded by the familiar gifts that God has given us.

He had demons. It is a straightforward statement, and a sadly accurate description of every life we meet. God has power to make these familiar lives his. He calls us to tell of the hope and the meaning that he offers.