

In the Gospel we find Jesus in Galilee, his home-territory. He's been **"proclaiming and preaching the Kingdom of God."** (Luke 8:1) He told the people about the power of God's Word and how it can save them, and he also warned them about the enemy. He healed the people of their diseases, and before his encounter with the demoniac in this morning's reading, he stilled the sea. And the disciples asked themselves, **"Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?"** This morning we're going to talk about who Jesus is and what he has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

### **OPENING PRAYER**

The Gospel reads, **Luke 8:26-29, they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 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 text says that **"a man"** met Jesus when he landed on shore. It does not say demons met him. Later the demons were in control of the conversation. However, it is the man who brought himself before Jesus for deliverance. We're to understand that the man came for this meeting willingly, that he hadn't been entirely taken over or consumed by the demons. He still had the power to say yes to Jesus.

It is the same as regards how we handle sin in our lives. If I were prone to kleptomania, I would need to be willing to be delivered from my desire to steal before I could actually stop doing it. This is freewill at work. God has a

plan, but I can choose not to play, or I can repent, which literally means to “change direction” or “turn around.”

The demons’ plea to Jesus that he would not torment it indicates that the demons knew they were on their way out. They had no power before the Lord, and they were begging for mercy.

Perhaps we’ve heard this story so many times, we miss the wonder of the encounter, that the demons begged for mercy! This should be a surprise. After all, their business was terror, fear, and death! How much destruction they must have reaped on earth! So why didn’t they want to go into the Abyss?

Consider the Gospel: **Luke 8:30-33: Jesus 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 were drowned.**

“**Legion**” was the word used by the Roman military to describe a group of 3,000 to 6,000 troops. This man had a city of demons in him!

Legion begged Jesus not to send it to “**the Abyss**” but to send it into the pigs. In the Bible, the “**Abyss**” is the final place of punishment for the devil and his minions.

It is a myth that hell is a giant party for everyone who thinks heaven is a bore and that God is a wet-blanket. Not even the demons wanted to go there, for that is where the Beast of the Revelation lives (Revelation 9:11, 11:7, etc.). Indeed, the demons found a wicked kind of joy in possessing a man’s body on sweet planet earth, thank you very much!

Even so, despite the demons plea for mercy, they cannot be saved. They are fallen angels, and Jesus didn’t die for angels, as we read in **Hebrews**

**2:16.** Even so, they begged for a period of rest before the final judgment in the Abyss. And Jesus revealed his compassion even for fallen angels.

But what about the poor pigs?! The demons probably ended up in the Abyss anyway; probably didn't anticipate that the pigs would go berserk. But why did Jesus allow the farmers to lose all their pigs? Because he didn't foresee what would happen? No, for Jesus is omniscient; he knows all things. He knew the demons would meet their end in the pigs in the lake, but he let them pull the trigger.

Did Jesus let this happen in this way because he was Jewish, and he wanted to rid the land of these nasty, unclean things? That would be small of him, wouldn't it. Besides, upon his Ascension, Christ declared all things clean. So this explanation doesn't make any sense either.

What the Lord did was provide an illustration for future generations, for you and me. That's why all these stories were written down that we might understand in our hearts the work of God. This story gives witness to Christ's compassion and God's justice. It's a story of life and death: The man was returned to sanity, saved from hell by the gentle hand of God, and the destruction of the demons in the freakish suicide of thousands of pigs illustrates the depth of the darkness of hell and God's judgment on evil.

The story continues: **Luke 8:34-39: 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.**

This is the heart of the story: The people have chosen sides. The man who had been delivered stayed with Jesus, but the herdsmen fled. The man was found sitting at the feet of the Lord, "**clothed and in his right mind,**" but the herdsmen were afraid. The man who had been delivered by the Lord wanted to be near him, near the power, near the source of his deliverance and healing, near the "**breath of life,**" but the townspeople asked "**him to depart from them.**"

Jesus had turned everyone's world upside down, breaking through their comfort zone, getting into their personal space. It is interesting, isn't it, that the people's comfort zone included a crazy man with demons running around, creating havoc, while they went about their business as though nothing was wrong.

But something was wrong, and what was wrong wasn't the crazy man, for the crazy man was no longer crazy! For the first time in his life the crazy man was right and everyone else was wrong! And what was wrong was the status quo, the business-as-usual, of his countrymen. When they asked Jesus to go, they were telling him that they would rather remain as they were. No changes, even for the better.

Do we welcome change, even for the better? When was the last time we moved our furniture, let alone set to change some irritating defect of character? I think the townspeople who'd seen the demoniac healed, asked themselves, "Is this Jesus going to move MY furniture around? Is there a possibility that he saw something in me that needs to be changed?"

Jesus told the healed man to "**Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.**" That's the right response, giving witness to the love of God. Alleluia! And consider what the man did: "**He went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.**" The man had connected the dots: Jesus was God. What God does and what Jesus did are one and the same. God acts through Jesus; Jesus is the presence of God. The man saw this; he felt this; and he shared his message.

But the people? Forgetaboutit! They were used to their bondage; they had become comfortable with it. That's the message: on the one hand, we have

complete deliverance—this man has come home from literal hell and he ain't going back! He's sticking to the **"Son of the Most High God"** like white on rice! But the others haven't seen how dark the darkness really is. It's as though they have condos on the precipice of the Abyss; they enjoy the view for it is so very pretty. But they are on the precipice of the Abyss! And the foundations of their condos aren't as solid as they'd like to think.

They didn't get it. They thought, "Healed demoniac and pigs in lake, not good, very strange; it's upset the status quo; call 9-1-1!"

But the man knew that wherever Jesus was, that place is the place where there is no darkness, nor shame, but there is only truth and light.

This story is like the story from last week, the one about the prostitute who drew so close to Jesus that she wept on his feet and wiped her tears away with her hair. Both were saved by faith, both were given a message, and both were sent away carrying in their hearts the peace of the Lord.

I think that's a good place to be, living by faith, to have a message, a saving message, and to have God's peace.

This week let us ask Jesus to change us, to deliver us, to make us whole.

This week let us receive Christ's deliverance from our sins with thankfulness.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.