

Sermon 6-20-10 Luke 8:26-39

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Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 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. 28 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"— 29 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.) 30 Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. 31 They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. 32 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. 33 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. 34 When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 35 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. 36 Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. 37 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. 38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "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.

Today's gospel story is the second in a series of four stories that highlight the power of God at work through Jesus. First, he stills a storm on the way across the lake and his disciples respond, "Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?" Then in today's story he exhibits power over demons. This is followed by two intertwined stories illustrating Jesus power over illness and even death, as he heals a bleeding woman who touches his clothes, while he's on his way raise Jairus' daughter from death.

These four stories remind us that an encounter with Jesus has the power to transform our lives. Do you believe it? Do you desire it? Are you ready for it to happen right here this morning? Are you open to Jesus freeing you from all the chains that bind you? Are you ready for those around you to become their best and true selves? Are you ready to be changed?

I think that we're more like the locals in our gospel story than we'd care to admit. We like things the way they are. Perhaps we recognize how our lives could be better, but we're comfortable and familiar how things are.

We already know the drill with our crazy naked man haunting the tombs. We developed this whole system of keeping him chained up and under guard. When he breaks loose and goes wandering off in the wilderness we send out a search party to bring him back. In some strange way his craziness keeps the rest of us sane. Seeing him sitting there at Jesus feet clothed and in his right mind is just too much. The demons are gone, from the man to pigs, and then drowned

in the lake, but their fear remains. The demon's fear, "What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth?" becomes the, "leave us alone," fear of the local population.

Perhaps they had every reason to fear. Perhaps, we too have every reason to fear. Whenever we cross paths with Jesus, whenever the power of God is loosed our lives change. And let's face it. We're emotionally attached to the way things are. Even when our functional patterns aren't healthy, at least they're familiar. When an alcoholic or addict gets clean and sober and returns home after treatment, other family members often have difficulty dealing with this new person, who's been freed from former chains.

Jesus has upset the status quo. Whose going to pay our guards unemployment benefits? What are we going to do with all this deviled ham? Who are we going to blame all our troubles on now when things go wrong?

Perhaps we are more like these locals than we like to admit. Instead of go away from us Jesus, sometimes we just don't open the door of our lives to let him in to begin with.

Perhaps we're also more like the man haunted by a legion of demons than we care to admit as well. Have you ever said yes to too many things in your life and it feels like competing voices are telling you to do this, no, focus on that? Have you ever had a painful experience or difficult encounter and you keep playing the scene over and over again in your mind? Well, I could have said this... or I wish I had done that.

The man in our story undoubtedly has an extreme case of being haunted by demons, and yet most of us have our own legion. Remember Jesus response to Martha when she demands that Jesus tell her sister, Mary, to help her. Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by a legion of things.

What are your demons like? Do you know their voices? Can you sense their fear here this morning? Jesus is here and they have every reason to be afraid. Just like the man in our story, the power of God through Jesus releases us from all the chains that bind us and from the legion of demons that can at times take control of our lives.

Once the demons are gone, the man is found clothed, in his right mind, sitting at Jesus feet. This is the classic posture that a student takes in the presence of a teacher. I imagine that he appears focused, no longer distracted and pulled this way and that by a legion of voices and demands. I imagine seeing a sense of peace and tranquility on his face, a reflection of his living in the now, present to each and every given moment. In my experience demons thrive in the environment of our rehashing the past or worrying about the future, but they cannot survive within one who is living in the present moment, open, attentive, and receptive to whatever may occur. This appears to be the new state of this man in Jesus' presence.

Understandably, the man wants to go off with Jesus. This time instead of the usual 'come and follow' Jesus tells him to 'stay and follow'. This man wants to be a follower of Jesus and continue to learn at Jesus feet. But Jesus declares his education complete, ordains him on the spot, and calls him to preach to the very ones who had chained him up in the tombs. Go and tell what God has done. Go and tell how the power of God has set you free from your demons and chains and life among the tombs. Go and tell what God has done for you. So he goes and tells what **Jesus** had done for him.

This man's preaching flows out from God's power of transformation in his life. It's not a self-help promotion. It's not seven-steps guaranteed to chase away your legion of demons. The focus is on what Jesus does. It's about the freedom that Jesus has brought into his life.

Once the people make their request, Jesus acquiesces to their wishes and leaves them alone, heading with his disciple's back across the lake, but he leave them a preacher in their midst. The power of God to change lives is present whenever and wherever the Living Word of Jesus is proclaimed, and what empowers the preacher is a changed life.

You might be saying to yourself, well I'm no preacher, but who in the community that kept this man chained up among the tombs would of expected him to be one.

Anyone who has ever experienced the weight of sin lifting, or the chains of guilt breaking, anyone who's ever experienced the peace that passes all understanding dispelling their fears and worries, anyone who rejoices that their demons have all been drowned in baptismal waters, has a story to tell. Today, Jesus sends us all back home to be preachers. Go and tell what God has done for you.

It's a message we proclaim in both word and deed. It's a message shown forth through the witness of our living clothed and in our right mind, freed from the demons of our past with a confident hope for the future. It's the story of how God frees us from all the chains that binds us in each and every present moment.

Today, we won't send you away Lord. Instead, we invite you to send away all that gets in the way of our living with you as our center. We trust in your power to change us, and having been freed and forgiven, how can we not be your hands, feet, and voice to transform the world.