

June 19 – Luke 8: 26-39

1. Read through the Gospel. What do you see as the main theme/s?

2. Put yourself in the scene with Jesus. What does it feel like?

3. How is Jesus' authority revealed?

1. How do people in our culture feel about demons?

2. How do you feel about the idea of demonic power at work in the world? How can we discern the difference between spiritual ailments and psychological or psychiatric ailments?

3. Why does Jesus ask the man his name?

4. How had the demons affected his social relationships (Luke 8:27)? How does sin affect our relationships with others (Titus 3:3)?

5. What surprising statement do the demons make about Jesus? How do they know his name? What title do they give to him? (b) Compare this with the statement made by the demon possessed man in Luke 4:33-36 (also Luke 4:41).

6. What does James 2:19 tell us about the beliefs of the demons?

7. Discuss the difference between "belief" and faith. Did the demons have the right beliefs? Did they have faith? Is it possible to have all the right doctrine and still not be a Christian?

8. What difference does it make that Jesus is this much more powerful than demons? What are some ways people feel, think and act that make it clear they don't really believe this?

9. How do the people respond when they found out what Jesus had done? 10. Why does their response seem surprising? Why do you think they responded the way they did? What does that tell you about people?

10. In what ways is this demon-possessed man an example for us?

11. As people who are in our "right minds" in relation to God, what rules of our community might God be calling us to break?

12. How is God speaking to you through this passage of Scripture?

13. C.S. Lewis wrote, "there are only two kinds of people—those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says in the end, 'They will be done.'" What do you make of this quote? How does it illustrate this passage?

- The story takes place in a Gentile context. Jesus has gone to the east side of the lake where cities of the Decapolis are scattered. The local folk keep pigs. We are in Gentile territory and Jesus will heal a Gentile. It is no small matter that the demons in Gentile territory obey Jesus. (see below).

Whatever we think about the demons, they were intensely real to the people of Gerasa and to the man whose mind was deranged. This man was a case of violent insanity. He was too dangerous to live amongst men and he lived amidst the tombs, which were believed to be the home and the haunt of demons. We may well note the sheer courage of Jesus in dealing with him. The man had a maniacal strength which enabled him to snap his fetters. His fellow-men were so terrified of him that they would never try to do anything for him; but Jesus faced him calm and unafraid.

When Jesus asked the man his name, he answered, "Legion." A Roman legion was a regiment of 6,000 soldiers. Doubtless this man had seen a Roman legion on the march, and his poor, afflicted mind felt that there was not one demon but a whole regiment inside him. It may well be that the word haunted him because he had seen atrocities carried out by a Roman legion when he was a child. It is possible that it was the sight of such atrocities which left a scar upon his mind and ultimately sent him mad.

Far too much difficulty has been made out of the pigs. Jesus has been condemned for sending the demons into the innocent swine. That has been characterised as a cruel and immoral action. Again we must remember the intensity of the belief in demons. The man, thinking the demons were speaking through him, pleaded with Jesus not to send them into the abyss of hell to which they would be consigned in the final judgment. He would never have believed that he was cured unless he had visible demonstration. Nothing less than the visible departure of the demons would have convinced him.

Surely what happened was this. The herd of swine was feeding there on the mountain side. Jesus was exerting his power to cure what was a very stubborn case. Suddenly the man's wild shouts and screams disturbed the swine and they went dashing down the steep place into the sea in blind terror. "Look!" said Jesus, "Look! Your demons are gone!" Jesus had to find a way to get into the mind of this poor man; and in that way he found it.

In any event, can we compare the value of a herd of swine with the value of a man's immortal soul? If it cost the lives of these swine to save that soul, are we to complain? Is it not perverse fastidiousness which complains that swine were killed in order to heal a man? Surely we ought to preserve a sense of proportion. If the only way to convince this man of his cure was that the swine should perish, it seems quite extraordinarily blind to object that they did. They loved their swine more than they valued the soul of a man. One of life's supreme dangers is to value things more than persons. That is what created slums and vicious working conditions. Nearer home, that is what makes us selfishly demand our ease and comfort even if it means that someone who is tired has to slave for us. No thing in this world can ever be as important as a person.

(ii) There was the man who was cured. Very naturally he wanted to come with Jesus but Jesus sent him home. Christian witness, like Christian charity, begins at home. It would be so much easier to live and speak for Christ among people who do not know us. But it is our duty, where Christ has set us, there to witness for him. And if it should happen that we are the only Christian in the shop, the office, the school, the factory, the circle in which we live or work, that is not matter for lamentation. It is a challenge in which God says, "Go and tell the people you meet every day what I have done for you."

- Furthermore, real human freedom is a gift and is expressed by discipleship. Sitting at the feet of someone is a clear expression for being a disciple (Compare Mary in Luke 10:39 or Acts 22:3).
- The demoniac has been saved. In verse 36 many translations (including the NRSV) tell us that demoniac had been "healed." This is certainly correct. We are again looking at the Greek word that can be translated as either saved or healed. We need to ask ourselves why we see such a difference between these two words in English. The man is healed from his demon possession, from the horrible slavery that had bound up his life with the dead in the place of tombs. He is at the same time saved from that horrible slavery, freed to re-join his community, able to sit quietly to learn, and strong enough to articulate both desire (verse 38) and assent to his own vocation.
- While this man wanted desperately to follow Jesus and was prepared to hop in the boat even as Jesus was pulling away, he was sent back to his city. This is not the way Jesus addresses many who seek to follow him (compare 9:57, 59, 61). We cannot generalize about what Jesus asks of his followers. Vocation is unique to the one called. Often it seems that we are called to do that which we do not want to do. How unbelievably difficult it would have been for the demoniac to return to his home town where he was so well known. People would have watched him carefully for a long time. He probably would not have married. Not only had he been mad, but his cure had cost the townspeople their living.

- Notice that Jesus commands the man to go home and declare how much God has done for you.” The man, however, testifies to what he knows—how much Jesus had done for him. There is a great freedom and strength in witnesses to what we know instead of always pressing ourselves or others to say more than we truly can. The man told the truth as he knew it (Compare the once blind man in John 10).
- Finally, we dare not ignore the difficulties in this passage—very real difficulties for all disciples. These difficulties beset us from the inside and the outside. One of them is fear. What we do not understand, what interrupts our relatively orderly lives, even if it is for someone’s good, frightens us. How can this be? What might this be? Where does this power come from? What if it turns against me? What does this power want? All good questions that make science fiction movies so fascinating and scary. These are the questions of the demoniac’s townsfolk.
- Add to the fear the fact that their economy has been destroyed by the loss of their pigs and we can understand why they can’t run Jesus out of town fast enough. What would farmers do in my own Midwestern location if someone destroyed their livestock? They would be unlikely to look around to see who benefitted from that destruction or to commend it, even if they did understand. The lives of families are at stake. When the healed/saved demoniac returns home, he is very courageous indeed. Since his situation is that of most of us, that is, we return home to say what the Lord has done for us, this passage confronts us with the need for courage, the difficulty of going back home to speak with people who know us well about our own salvation and healing, and the power of the Lord to free us for such a life.