

<sup>26</sup> Then they sailed to the region of the Gerasenes,<sup>[b]</sup> which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup> When he got out on land, a demon-possessed man from the town met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes and did not stay in a house but in the tombs. <sup>28</sup> When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before him, and said in a loud voice, “What do you have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torment me!” <sup>29</sup> For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was guarded, bound by chains and shackles, he would snap the restraints and be driven by the demon into deserted places.

<sup>30</sup> “What is your name?” Jesus asked him.

“Legion,” he said, because many demons had entered him. <sup>31</sup> And they begged him not to banish them to the abyss.

<sup>32</sup> A large herd of pigs was there, feeding on the hillside. The demons begged him to permit them to enter the pigs, and he gave them permission. <sup>33</sup> The demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

<sup>34</sup> When the men who tended them saw what had happened, they ran off and reported it in the town and in the countryside. <sup>35</sup> Then people went out to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and found the man the demons had departed from, sitting at Jesus’s feet, dressed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. <sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the eyewitnesses reported to them how the demon-possessed man was delivered. <sup>37</sup> Then all the people of the Gerasene region<sup>[c]</sup> asked him to leave them, because they were gripped by great fear. So getting into the boat, he returned.

<sup>38</sup> The man from whom the demons had departed begged him earnestly to be with him. But he sent him away and said, <sup>39</sup> “Go back to your home, and tell all that God has done for you.” And off he went, proclaiming throughout the town how much Jesus had done for him.

### How much God has done

This last week my daughter was scared. I don’t know if it was a dream or what it was but she slowly made her way back to our bedroom at time or two. After a while I thought, let’s give her something to make her feel safe and comfortable. So I gave her one of my old knives. I wasn’t intending on teaching her how to open it, but my wife saw to that. She warned her that it was sharp and not to cut yourself. But then I began to regret my decision. Not because she now has a knife that she carries with her everywhere but because I don’t want her to treat that knife like an idol and think, “This will keep me safe.” If she is afraid, she shouldn’t turn to a knife, or even herself, but rather to her God.

The same is true for us. We can surround ourselves with things that help us provide safety and security but if we’re not putting our trust in God then we will never find peace. The disciples in our Gospel needed to learn this lesson. First they were out on the Sea of Galilee in a storm. They were in their element but that too was beyond their control. Now they arrive at the other side of the Sea of Galilee they are even more out of their element. Arriving in a pagan land, among unclean animals, at an unclean graveyard, with a welcoming committee of a naked demon possessed man (or men according to the other Gospel accounts). I think I’d much bigger knife.

But Jesus calms their fears and demonstrates the power of his word over even demons. His gives this very word to one formerly possessed so that he too may tell his family how much God has done. This is the same word given to you and me. It’s a word that is powerful and effective. It is a word that works, bringing life, hope, and peace among the dead. Because the Word proclaims how much God has done.

First, this is Jesus’ idea. Jesus says to his disciples, “*Let’s cross over to the other side of the lake.*” As they set out, Jesus fell asleep. A fierce storm came down and they were in danger. This is out of their control. So they wake Jesus. He calms the storm and they question, “*Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.*” As soon as they step off the boat, they’re

not in Kansas anymore. They are not among God's people. They are outside the Promised Land, among the Gentiles, in Roman territory, among those who God never commanded, "Don't eat pork."

This is pagan land, Gentile territory. How fitting that they would be greeted by the demon possessed man. And what a greeting! We talked about being hospitable last week but can you imagine this greeting. "*For a long time he had worn no clothes and did not stay in a house but in tombs.*" He's not housebroken by any means. He lives among the dead. He's crying out, falling down before Jesus, and shouting, "*What do you have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torment me!*" It appears the demons understand Jesus better than his own disciples. They seem surprised to see Jesus. It's not time yet! They realize that this is before the appointed time (Revelation 20:10).

This is real demon possession. It's not mental illness by any means. The evidence of this is the shackles that hang from his hands and feet. Unnatural power has been given to this man. He is able to break chains but he isn't in control. A demon seized him, took control and drove him out to a deserted place. Jesus asks, "*What is your name?*" and I don't know if he is asking the man or the demons within. But we find out who Jesus is dealing with. He is confronted not by one demon but a whole army of them. A Legion was an army up to 6,000 strong. This is a large group working together. They torment this man. He is unclothed, unwashed, living among the unclean. His movement is restricted. No one wants him around. They try to bind him and keep him away.

All of this demonstrates to us that the devil and demons are not ones to be trifled with. They are real even if you haven't seen it. But demons can only enter when invited. However once the door is open you can't shut it on your own. This may have been what this man found out. We won't ever experience demon possession because we are possessed by another Spirit, the Spirit of God.

But that doesn't mean we don't struggle with one who cannot be bound or chained. He's uncontrollable. At times he's naked and lawless. You'd be in disbelief of what came out of his mouth. At times you don't even recognize the man. No, it's not Legion, we call it by another name, the sinful nature. Sinful because that's what it does, sin. Nature because we are born in it, it's what's natural to us. This one gets the best of me. He is me, my thoughts, words, and actions. That's the real demon within and I'm terrified to think of what he is capable of. Sometimes we don't even recognize the person staring back at us in the mirror. We don't know what it's like to be possessed but we know what it is like to be us. Our hearts are set on this world. On the things we want. We think we can do whatever we want to get ahead. These sins only enslave. That one drink has brought you back down. That internet addiction just wasted another hour. That fear over what you can't control, yeah it's being taken out on your body. Evil is alive and well within.

The worst part is that, we aren't possessed, yet we've freely chosen the insanity of sin, sin against a God who we know exists and yet a God who we still disobey. We aren't demon possessed and we still struggle, how much more won't those who are possessed struggle? There are others who deal with demons. They are self-inflicted and suffering. They may greet you in the same way as they did Jesus... naked and crying out. That's not a moment to be filled with pride, "At least I have my demons under control." It's a time to realize, "That could be me." It can be terrifying but the same powerful word Jesus spoke has been given to you. This Word tells us what he has done. How he crossed the Sea for this demon possessed man.

Think about what Jesus accomplished. He healed a man and then went home. This man was so far from Jesus, held captive, bound in chains, and possessed. He may not have been in control but Jesus is. Just look at how the demons must obey. He is the superior authority. They must do as he commands. Even if many demons are present they must obey. "*They begged him not to banish them to the abyss.*" *A large herd of pigs was there, feeding on the hillside. The demons begged him to permit them to enter the pigs, and he gave them permission. The demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.*"

Why this? Why the huge economic loss to this Gentile area? Maybe that was Legion's intention. They want to make Jesus unpopular among the people or they just want to destroy what God has created. Then again, I think Jesus is brighter than any legion of demons and he knew that the same destructive force on this man unleashed on those pigs would send them to the abyss. It could also be proof an exorcism took place. No matter what happened, the news spread fast

People went out to see what had happened. They *came to Jesus and found the man sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.* As they should be. One more powerful than their pagan gods is among them. Before them stands one who has authority over demons, who can control those they cannot. They ask him to leave, meanwhile the formerly demon possessed man begs to go with him. Jesus responds, "*Go back to your home, and tell all that God has done for you.*" *And he went, proclaiming throughout the town how much Jesus had done for him.*" This man had his life restored to him. Did he have family that had given up on him? When was the last time he had been home? Look how life had changed. He's in his right mind. He's wearing clothes again. And he rushes off to tell all that what? Jesus had done for him. Even this one recognized Jesus is God. Each day he is reminded of who he once was and how he is now set free.

And that's not all that Jesus has done for you. He crossed not only the Sea of Galilee but he came into this world. He humbled himself to be born of a virgin. He came to those enslaved to the devil, bound by sin, and he sets us free. Only Jesus removes the devil – no work we can do. This is a conversion story. This is what happened when God came to you. Luther's baptismal rite began with an exorcism. In baptism he drowns your sins, placing them in the abyss where they are forgotten. Though your sins be legion they are forgiven. God gives you his name. You are adopted into his family, brought into his family, though you wander like a prodigal, he forgives.

He then clothes us in his righteousness. And now in the right mind we can sit at his feet and listen. What does he give us? Forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. His very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Many people when asked what the most important words are in the Lord's Supper say, "This is my body," or "This is my blood." But for Lutherans the most important words are "for you." Jesus gives us his body and his blood for you to forgive you.

Jesus came to deliver us from the claim sin had on us. He set us free. He came for the unclean, not to condemn but to give life. He restores this man. He also restores you. How was this possible? Was it because you were more willing? Less dead? No. It was because on the cross he died for your sin. He rose for you. He lives for you. And his word still works and brings sanity to an insane world. That's part of why we worship on a regular basis. It's because his word confronts the confusion and allows us to see clearly and set our mind right. If we had no sin we would be immune to the devils temptations

And then Jesus tells us, "*Go home and tell how much God has done for you.*" We'd rather be with Jesus, that's for sure. But until then we return to family, friends, maybe some of them look and act as if possessed and then we tell them, "This is how much God has done for me." And maybe when you come back to them again everyone will come out to listen.... like the 2<sup>nd</sup> time Jesus visited this same area. That formerly demon possessed man told everyone how much God had done.

Does your daughter still need a knife to defend herself? Of course. So long as she doesn't put her trust in it. We too can have nice things that provide us with a sense of security and peace because we can trust that God provides all that we need and more. We've already seen how much God has done for us in Christ. Amen.