

Luke 8:26-39

**Legion@
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This story of Jesus casting the demons into the pigs is the first account we have of Deviled Ham!

You might feel a little sorry for the pigs in this story, but when you think about it, anyone would prefer to see demons tormenting swine over tormenting a poor human. Right?

Well, you would think so, but apparently the community of the Geresenes did not agree. They were so fearful of what had happened and what Jesus might do next, they packed him up in the boat he arrived in and sent him and his disciples back to Galilee.

We will never really know why Jesus sailed across the lake to this little Gentile community. On the way there he calms a storm on the lake – just speaks the word and the storm dies down.

Actually, it was believed that demons had to do with winds and storms too, not just nature, so it might be considered that Jesus also calmed down the demons on the way.

Then, he arrives in the land of the Gerasenes (his first, and only time, to go to the land of the Gentiles) and really, the only thing he does there is an exorcism.

He gets out of the boat, followed by his disciples and he walks onto the land where the first thing he comes to is a cemetery and he encounters a man who is tormented by, not just one demon, but a legion of demons. Do you know how many are counted in a legion?

In the Roman army, a legion was something like 6,000 soldiers! When Jesus asked, “What is your name?” The demons that had taken over this poor, naked, chained up man, answered, “Legion!” Because there were many.

6,000 demons? We don’t know for sure how many. But the symbolism is that there was a mob of them.

And the thing is, they all knew who Jesus was! Jesus had never been there. No one there knew him. But Luke tells us the demons sure knew him.

They cried, ““What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.”

These powerful, evil possessors knew that they had met their match with the Son of God and they – yes, *even they* – were afraid.”
They begged Jesus not to send them back to the abyss.

The dictionary defines *abyss* as:

a deep, immeasurable space, a gulf, or cavity; vast chasm; anything profound, unfathomable, or infinite: the abyss of time ... the primal chaos before Creation; the infernal regions; hell.

They begged Jesus to send them into the herd of swine that were feeding on the hillside, so Jesus did. That didn't end so good for the pigs or the owners of the pigs.

As soon as the legion of demons entered those fat little piggies, they trotted like crazy down the hill and jumped off the cliff and fell to the rocks and the water below, all of them dying in the fall.

You can imagine the excitement and the amazement of those who saw it, especially the owners of the pigs! They went running to tell others what they had witnessed and the whole community comes running to see for themselves.

They find this man whom they were accustomed to seeing completely crazed, naked, chained to the tombs – except on those occasions when he managed to get loose – sitting now quietly, sanely, fully clothed at the feet of the one who had healed him.

And, I don't know about you, but when I hear what happens next, my first reaction is to shake my head in disbelief. Here is a man of the community – a citizen – one of them, who was completely lost to the evil powers that had overtaken him, and now saved, from all that had possessed him. He is once again sane and at peace and happy and well.

And all they can do is ask Jesus, out of fear, to leave their country. Really? I mean, I can see being afraid of that kind of power, but imagine what all he could do for the rest of them!

But maybe that's just the point. Because when the power of Jesus enters into your presence, things really have to change, don't they? You really can't go on with all your old unhealthy, crazy ways if Jesus decides to heal you of them.

And let's face it, most people like what they are accustomed to. Something different, even if it promises to be more life-giving, to be full of healing and hope and peace – well, it's change, after all. And we really do not care for change.

They say that a woman who is abused will stay with her abuser because it's what she knows and the outside world is more uncertain, scarier, than living in the hell she is in.

It is the same way with children who are abused by their parents. If they have to choose between staying with their parents or going to a family who is said to be kind and gentle, but a family they don't know, they will usually choose their parents. They know and love their parents. It is their reality, whether it is good or bad.

Of course, today, we would probably call this man schizophrenic and send him to therapy. We tend to not call mental illness a possession by demons.

But I would challenge us to think about the demons in our lives never-the-less. We certainly have witnessed what most of us consider evil – the mass shooting of innocent children at Sandy Hook, the murder of those studying the bible in their church in Charleston, Alabama; the Isis shootings in San Bernardino; and now, just one week ago, 49 people killed and many more injured in a club in Orlando.

Where is Jesus when we need him most? I wish he would sail up and get out of his boat and walk into those terrible places and heal us of the evil and the war and the chaos we seem to witness all the time.

Of course, he didn't do that when the early Christians were being persecuted and he hasn't done it with us either. It almost seems like he sailed too far away.

And what about those everyday demons we see in others? Those who are cantankerous and rude; those who are nice one day and mean the next?

What about those who would rather be mean than give you a smile, or those who would cut in and be first, regardless of the fact that you are obviously disabled in some way?

What about those whose anger can be triggered by almost nothing and you are blown away by the force of their wrath?

Yet, how easy it is for us to see the demon in others and not see the demons in ourselves, right? Here is where it gets really personal because we face all kinds of demons within.

Some of us have a mob of voices that speak to us – they tell us we are no good, we are stupid, we are too fat, too skinny, too old, too young.

We are addicted to whatever we choose to use that numbs us and gives us a little measure of pleasure because we are down and depressed, sometimes in a very dangerous place.

We may not be chained to a tombstone, but we can be held in bondage, nevertheless, by our own personal demons.

Oh, but we are used to our demons. And the rub is that if Jesus came to cast them out, we just might be fearful and even angry.

Because as much as we might want those voices to shut up within us, they are familiar and they have become our identity, in a way. Not for all, but for many. It is what we know; what we have grown used to.

But here is the promise and the power in this story. It seems Jesus may have sailed to the land of the Gerasenes for the sole purpose of healing this one man. And if he would do that for him, he will do it for you. This man did not even ask Jesus to come. Imagine what would happen if you *did* ask him.

The power of the Son of the Most High God is that he is able to cast away the things that are tormenting you. He may use counselors or doctors or medicine, but he is able. His power is greater than any demon you might be acquainted with.

As for the evil in the world, He is aware, He is at work, He can make good come out of the worst situation; he is still ultimately in control over life and death.

Whoever your Legions are, do not be afraid. The one who is sent by God is still among us and he can still save us from all that anxiety, depression, addiction, whatever it is that wants to take over and keep you from being the you God created you to be. He loves you. He is with you. He is always more powerful than any other power. Believe it, and rejoice in the love, the power and the grace of the Lord.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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