

Luke 8:26-39 “Legion”

June 19, 2016

Early in the week when I start in on looking at the lessons for Sunday morning, I’m looking for three things, how they connect to each other, how they connect to spiritual needs at the time, and how they connect to our spiritual needs today.



In the Old Testament lesson God says that He wants to be found. He wants to bring grace. He’s knocking at the door, calling out, “Here am I.” He spreads out His hands and calls to the people but they don’t answer. They don’t listen. They follow their own devices and provoke God to His face. They worship everything and everyone but the true God. Instead of a sweet aroma, the whole place stinks of death. They don’t want to listen to what the Bible says. Instead, they blithely follow their own misguided ideas.

Times certainly haven’t changed. We live in the midst of a people who openly reject the invitation of God and the Word of God for the sake of whatever is current or popular or politically correct. Back in Isaiah 65, God had about had enough and would have destroyed them all, except for one thing, there was a blessing to be found among them. Living in the midst of all that evil and corruption there was a sprinkling of the offspring of Jacob. Back in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, if there had been ten righteous ones living in the land, God would have spared it. Alas, there were not ten. Their world was not totally dark. There was the light of the Gospel. So God said that for the sake of the believers still in their midst, He will not utterly destroy them and in fact, God would continue to seek them out by means of those faithful ones still remaining in their midst.

Now, skip ahead to Luke 8 and what do you see? You see the Gerasenes, a people very far from God. A people possessed, caught up and held captive by sin. A people, who when shown the grace and mercy of God in the incarnate Son of God ran Him out of town. He threatened their livelihood. He took away their pigs. He brought economic collapse. The demon possessed man was really a picture of them all. He is really a collection of all of us in our sin. Out of his mind, he yells and curses. He is a danger to himself and others. Every part of his life is broken. Here’s a guy who can’t walk and chew gum at the same time. He could not even speak for himself. He couldn’t even ask for help. Every time he opened his mouth, only the demons spoke. And then it happened, Jesus delivered him, rescued him, healed him, saved him, and he was so happy. He is sitting quietly, dressed and in his right mind for the first time. Now he has a request of Jesus, let me come with You. Don’t leave me here in the God-forsaken place, surrounded by people who are still demon-possessed. Take me with You. Like God himself said in Isaiah 65, “This place stinks. Please don’t leave me here”

But Jesus had another idea. He wanted to leave the no-longer-possessed man there in that terrible place. Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you. Jesus knew more than anyone how dark a place that was. It was a place that needed light and grace, and Jesus was not ready to wash His hands of it and abandon it yet. Jesus would leave, but He would leave behind someone to speak words of hope and be a walking sign of hope in an otherwise hopeless place. Stay here and be salt and light.

One of the first thoughts that comes from this text is that it’s a strange story. It’s the kind of thing that doesn’t happen today. Then you come to the sacrament of Baptism this morning and the question was asked, “Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways”? Do you believe ... Do you believe ... Do you believe ... It sounds like an exorcism. What we say in Baptism is true. We are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. Baptism actually does something. If you think babies are born pure and perfect, then there’s really nothing for Baptism to do. But if you understand that we’re all born broken and sinful, inheriting the corrupt nature of our parents, then, like the demon possessed man, we all come with a spiritual affliction that only God can fix.

This demon possessed man suffers isolation. He suffers desperation. He is out of control and on the verge of self-destruction. His home is the cemetery and he lives in the midst of death. He is being eaten alive from the inside by his demons. That’s what the devil really wants. He doesn’t love us or care for us. He only wants to play with us, to torment us, to have some fun with us until all we want to do is die. Is it any wonder that so many people in our society cry out in agony for the right to die? They see no other escape. I remember watching my grandmother’s cat play with a mouse he had found in the farmyard. The cat only put it out of its misery and ate it when the poor mouse had become too exhausted

to play anymore. The devil is a roaring lion, looking for someone to play with and then devour after he's had all the fun he's going to get

In the middle of all this, Jesus comes with His promise of deliverance. God is not content that we should perish. He does not want His creation to be lost forever. He sends the Christ for us and when He comes into our lives something happens to us. We see God as He truly is. We see one who shows us His steadfast love and grants us His salvation by sending His Son to pay the price for our salvation. Think about who Jesus is. The wind and waves obey Him. The power of death is no match for Him. Even the demons that torment us must obey Him. Time after time Jesus was met with hopeless cases. There was that woman with the issue of blood. For twelve years she's been to every doctor and no one could heal her. She had spent all she had and instead of getting better, she grew worse. There was Mary and Martha, totally overcome with grief when Lazarus died. Lord, if you had been here, he wouldn't have died. Now it's too late. He's dead. There was the widow of Nain whose son had died. She was left all alone and without support of any kind, no husband, no son. Life was certainly unfair to her. There was the man born blind. There was the cripple at the pool of Bethesda. He'd been there for thirty-eight years, trying to be the first one into the pool when the angel stirred it up. Thirty-eight years he's been waiting for help and none has come ... until Jesus came and healed him.

To the eyes of our Saviour, there are no hopeless cases. So why do we cry out to Jesus for help so seldom? We only seem to fall at Jesus' feet in prayer when all else fails. Prayer becomes a last resort instead of a first response. It seems as if Jesus was confronted by the sick and needy, the grieving and the distressed on a daily basis. Was there more need then, or was Jesus just more in tune with the vastness of human need? Have we simply taught ourselves to ignore the needs of people around us? All of this takes place in the region of the Decapolis, the ten cities of modern day Syria. This is Gentile country. What do we know about the people of the town? They were more worried about wealth than salvation. They chased bread and hadn't learned that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. We are surrounded by a people and a society that is more worried about wealth than salvation. The people were consumed by their possessions and livelihood to the point that they rejected what Jesus came to bring them. They had their own legion of demons, rebellion against God, self-love.

Every human being by nature is terrified by God, resists Him and fears Him. We are left with this grand contrast. The man Jesus rescued that day wanted to be with Him. He wanted to sit with Jesus and to follow Jesus. The people of the town just wanted Jesus to leave and stop disrupting their priorities. It makes you wonder who was really demon possessed and under the rule and control of the devil? It makes you realize that apart from faith in Christ, we are all under sin. Those who saw what happened, went and told the people of the town how the demon-possessed man had been cured. The "crazy man" was now dressed, sitting at Jesus' feet and in his right mind. Luke then tells us that all the people of the region asked Jesus to leave, because they were overcome with fear.

Compare that to how the legion of demons had responded when they saw Jesus. The demons were afraid and wanted to get as far away from Jesus as they could. Don't torture us, don't send us into the Abyss. Get away from us, leave us alone. As long as Jesus was there, the people of the town expected only bad things to happen. They want life without God and without Christ because, to them, life with God and with Christ would be unimaginably terrible. People today think the same way. How can anyone want to be a Christian? There's no fun in life ... all those rules to obey. Why should I want to go to church on such a beautiful day? I've got better things to do. Life without God has to be better than life with God. That's what they thought. The demons hadn't just filled the pigs, they had filled the people. They are all under the control of the evil one.

After he was rescued, the man wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus instead called him to be an ongoing witness to the people of the town. These people are as you once were ... lost, out of their minds, and Jesus did not want to leave them without a witness to the power and grace of God. So Jesus gave the man a new mission in life. Bear witness to Christ right where he is. They had rejected Jesus and His ministry in their midst, but Jesus' compassion and love for them had not run out. Think about it. Could you imagine Jesus saying to the man He has just rescued from hopelessness and death, "Yes, come with me and let those sinners all go to hell. Let's leave them to their wickedness and unbelief."? Jesus still had compassion for them. He would not leave them without a witness to the grace and power of God. He still wanted to have mercy on them, so He commissioned the man to be an ongoing witness to the power of Jesus in his life.

What's your mission in life? Do you see your life in those terms? Do you understand that where God has placed you in the community and in the workplace or school, He wants you to tell others how much God has done for you? The people

around you need to hear from you how Jesus has rescued you from sin and death and changed your life. The man who had been naked and out of control is now, through the presence and power of Jesus, clothed and calmly sitting at the feet of his true master. He has been set free from demon possession and brought into the kingdom of God and the reign of grace. He has been spiritually healed, saved and cleansed from the unclean spirits. In contrast, the people of the town were still under the control of demons. They were under Satan's power and did even not recognize it. They asked Jesus to leave, but His grace hasn't end yet. Jesus would remain with them through the proclamation of His work given by the healed man.

Jesus has power over natural and physical storms. He also has authority over the winds of a spiritual storm. Not only do the wind and waves obey Him, but He can rescue and calm troubled hearts and souls too. There are spiritual forces that threaten to possess us and to overturn our faith, isolation, desperation, fear, and worry. When they arise, Jesus comes with His grace to set us free. There are spiritual forces that want to mess with our priorities. Are you more like the world than like Jesus? Are you more worried about wealth than salvation? How many other things get in the way of worship? How many other things keep you from sitting at Jesus' feet, growing in faith and in the Word of God? How often do your priorities become every bit as strange and mixed up as the people of the town? You like to go along with the crowd and having Jesus with you gets uncomfortable. You don't want Jesus to leave for good, you just want Him to leave you alone for now, so you can do what you want without Him watching you.

Today we had the opportunity to witness the baptism of little Kaia Elizabeth. What did you see? You saw a miracle. When a little child is baptized, we all speak on the child's behalf in witness to what God is doing in her heart, in and through baptism, renouncing the devil, renouncing his works, renouncing his ways. In baptism Jesus delivers us from the kingdom of darkness and brings us into His kingdom. In and through baptism you have received the same miracle that the man in our text received. You were born sinful and lost. You were born spiritually dead. You were born enemies of God. And in baptism God rescued you, forgave all your sins, made you alive in Christ, and clothed you in Jesus' perfect righteousness. And in baptism God called you to witness to others all that Jesus has done for you.

There are times when you and I slip back into our old ways when we have given God second place, or no place, and let the devil move back in. That's why God, in His grace, comes to us again with His healing touch and His power and word of forgiveness that we might have again His forgiveness for our sins and the power to live for Him, and to bear witness to what He has done in our lives.