

**“How Much God Has Done”**

*The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him (Luke 8:38-39).*

Over the last two weeks, we have followed the ministry of Jesus as He raised a boy from the dead (Luke 7:11-17) and restored a sinful and broken woman through the miracle of forgiveness (Luke 7:36-8:3). We have watched across time as Jesus asserted his power over sin and death, and today, as we continue our journey through Luke’s Gospel, we find Jesus in a very real faceoff with evil personified as He confronts a group of demons that had devastated an unnamed man from an unbelieving country.

In verse 26 we are told that Jesus and His disciples sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite from Galilee. This simple statement of setting may seem insignificant and yet it does much more than just telling us where they had landed. Luke’s words inform us that Jesus had left the region of the Jews and was now in a gentile territory and, in the instant He steps onto shore, this change in location is amplified by the greeting He received from a local man who, we are told, had demons.

The language of Luke is important in describing this meeting on the beach. In our English text, we are simply told that Jesus was met by the demon-possessed man, but the original Greek verb used in verse 27 is actually a word with military connotations. It is a verb of confrontation and it gives the sense of an altercation on the battlefield and that is exactly the way we should understand this encounter on the shore.

As Luke sets the stage for the story, we are presented with a tragic tale of a man who had once lived in the community of a city but had now become a pariah, completely isolated from others. The man with demons was an outcast among his own people and Luke underscores this heartbreaking picture by telling us that, “For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs” (Luke 8:27). This is a description of loneliness and utter isolation and it is a picture that connects to our Old Testament reading from Isaiah where God describes, “a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places” (Isaiah 65:3-4). Like the idolatrous people of Isaiah’s day, this is a man who had completely rejected anything godly and had become a menace to everyone around him.

After an exhausting and harrowing trip across the Sea of Galilee in which Jesus had actually calmed a storm and rebuked His own faithless disciples, this is the welcome He receives and yet Jesus doesn’t blink. Without even one hint of hesitation, Jesus engaged the evil in front of Him and when the demon-possessed man saw Jesus, Luke tells us that, “he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me” (Luke 8:28). There was no uncertainty in these words, the demons in this man knew exactly who Jesus was and unlike the tentative and doubting disciples, the demon-possessed man identified Jesus as the “Son of the Most High God.”

The action that happens next is extraordinary as Jesus begins to deal with the demons, ultimately sending the legion of evil spirits into a nearby herd of pigs, promptly causing the unclean animals to rush down the bank into the water where they are destroyed. This action not only rid the man of the tormenting spirits, but it also created quite a commotion in the community as the men who had been herding the pigs saw their livelihood lost in the lake. Concerned less about the outcast who had been released from demon-possession, these herdsmen ran off and reported the details of the story to the people of the city and when the people went out to see what had happened, Luke tells us that, “they came to Jesus and 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. And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned” (Luke 8:35-37).

Luke doesn't give us a clear marker of time in this story. We really don't know how long Jesus stayed in this pagan land, but we know the visit was brief. Jesus leaves as quickly as He came, and yet, in His short stay, everything had changed for the man who had been possessed. Jesus and His disciples had made the difficult trip from across the sea and, as it turns out, *the entire trip had been made for this one lost and lonely man!*

Our house sits right across the street from a large Park Center group home. The purpose of this facility is to provide a refuge and shelter for people who have been isolated and removed from "normal" society for a variety of reasons. Some of the men who live in this house struggle with addiction, some deal with mental illness and others have been placed in this home because they are completely alone in the world and unable to cope with the stresses of life. In many ways, the people who live in the house across the street from my family bear a striking resemblance to the man from today's Gospel reading.

This week, as I studied our text from Luke, I began to notice my own reaction to my neighbors and it was humbling and quite convicting. Oftentimes in the course of everyday life I cross paths with one of the men who live in this halfway house and my response to these random meetings is usually one of great caution. At times I avert my glance, careful not to make eye contact, other times I've gone inside when my neighbors are out working in the yard and, like the herdsmen in the Gospel reading, there are even times I've called the police when an argument between two of the residents has escalated. But in all the time I've lived there, I have never once crossed the street to greet one of them and, I would guess, that not many of you would've done so either.

*I can't cross the street!* but Jesus goes across the Sea of Galilee and *He does it for this one man!* This account is included in three of the four Gospels, it is a pivotal story in Jesus' ministry. It is an example of how, in Christ, we should view outcasts and aliens but, even more importantly, in this story of the demon-possessed pariah, we see ourselves! The fact is that we are all plagued by the presence of evil. For some of us, it shows up in grief, for some it is seen in anger or in greed or in the need to control others. It changes for each one of us, but all of us experience the evil of this broken world and every one of us struggles with our own demonic nature. Like the man in our story, by nature every one of us is terrified of God, opposed to His presence and every one of us resists His word. We are as Isaiah writes, "a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good" (Isaiah 65:2) and apart from God we are driven into a dangerous isolation.

But God took the initiative and like we heard in the Old Testament lesson, He has revealed Himself to those who did not ask for Him and He has found those who did not seek Him. In sending Jesus Christ, the Son of the Most High, God has crossed time and space and He has confronted our sin and rejection with an authority that even the demons must acknowledge, and just as Luke described in today's reading, on the cross Christ did battle with the evil that would destroy us; He took on our rejection, He assumed our sins; and today He stands in the center of the chaos of our lives as our risen and glorified Lord and God and His presence changes everything! Where Christ is, there is peace. Where Christ is, there is hope. Where Christ is, there is community, there is forgiveness, there is life, and where Christ is, evil is driven out.

After Jesus drove the demons out of the man, He told him, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." Christ crossed the lake to restore this man, not only so that the man would be "dressed and in his right mind" but so that this once ostracized and isolated outcast could go home, could be reunited with his family, could rejoin his community and could carry with him a message of "how much God has done" for him.

Dear friends, please know that the same God who raised the dead boy of Nain; and the same God who forgave the sinful woman at Simon's house; and the same God who drove out demons on the shore of the Sea of Galilee is here for us today. Through His Word, Christ is present to restore us, to forgive us, to bring us peace, to show the way of hope and to give us eternal life. Receive the healing power and promise of His Word, knowing that, in His power, you can go home *and cross the street* and tell how much God has done for you. Amen.

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