

Sermon: Lost and found Psalm 22:19-28 Luke 8:26-39

Most of us don't know anyone possessed by demons or evil spirits, which makes this Gospel story a little hard for us to relate to. But, let me say two things about demon stories. First, I don't think that we can deny that there are demons in our world. As a pastor and friend, I have had people share their stories about demons that seem very real to them. I'm not going to say that they don't exist, but I will say that I believe *Jesus is stronger than any demon in our world*. The other thing I want to say is that even if we don't see demons at work in our world today, I do think that these stories can help us think about our world, and *help us to see God at work*. Think for a moment about what the demons in the Bible actually *do*. They consistently do three things. First, they cause self-destructive behaviour in the person they are invading. Next, they cause this person to feel trapped by their condition. And, finally, they separate this person from their family, friends, and community. So, if you think about demons in that way, then there are many demons in our world, aren't there? Things that cause self-destructive behaviour, that cause us to feel trapped by our condition, and that separate us from family, friends, and community.

Just before this morning's story, Jesus has silenced the storm on the lake, bringing calm to the wind and waves, and now He's about to silence the demonic storm in the life of the Gerasene man. Jesus finds this demon-possessed fellow, who wants nothing to do with Jesus. In fact, he's afraid of God; tormented by the very thought of God. But as we have also seen, this man named *Legion* is healed; freed from the chains that bind him.

Legion. There's an interesting name. This man calls himself *Legion* because it's like he has 6,000 evil spirits inside him; the same number of soldiers in a Roman legion. Let's pause here for a second. We have all heard people speak; maybe even ourselves; about "inner demons". "Inner demons" are the those struggles that we all face within ourselves. They might appear as fear, self-doubt, insecurity, anger, criticism, addiction, anxiety, depression, temptation, guilt . . . the list goes on. Now, imagine you had these and many more inner demons. This is the meaning of the name *Legion* here. This poor fellow was so demon-possessed that he was literally driven out of his mind. We can understand this because his "Inner demons" would have negatively affected his physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, which in turn would have negatively affected his personal growth and happiness. I would argue that when we better understand, face, and are released from our own "inner demons", the door opens to a more fulfilling and joyful life.

When Jesus relieved the man of the overwhelming demons, he was now in his right mind and wanted nothing more than to just rest at the feet of Jesus. For the first time in his life, he was at peace, relaxed, focused, and ready to accept the God he previously loathed and feared. He was so changed by Jesus' presence that he even wanted to accompany Jesus wherever Jesus traveled.

How many folks do we know who are struggling? I don't mean demon-possessed; that's harsh; but people who are not close to God right now; perhaps uncomfortable with God themselves; not knowing the peace, love, and joy that comes with knowing Jesus; not yet aware what the church; that is, you and me; can really be in their lives. I think we can be sure that there are a lot of folks who are searching for something, and by our engaging with

them and listening to them, maybe we can help them find what; or in this case Who; they are looking for. People look in many places for meaning and purpose in their life.

I've spoken with a lot of people who say they are *spiritual*. I'm never really sure what *spiritual* means because when I ask what the person means by spiritual, their answers are often vague at best. What this tells me is that folks are at least aware that there is something or someone greater than themselves. In the Alcoholics Anonymous program, for example, the second step is to "believe that a power greater than yourself can restore you". That said, many folks may not know how to connect with that power greater than themselves. The very fact that people are searching is proof that there is an unfulfilled need in their lives; a need to explore some basic 'what is the meaning of my life' questions, a need for purpose and fulfilment, a need to be in community with others, a need to find some closure with a difficult situation, or to resolve something yet unresolved. Now, the Good News is that while we are looking, God sees where we are and seeks us out. God does not abandon or forsake us.

Jesus came looking for *Legion*, and when He found him, *Legion* was reconciled with God and no longer lost to the demons which invaded his soul. What a miserable existence this must have been. We can almost feel the self-loathing the poor guy must have had; naked and unwashed; no place to call home; living in the shadows among the tombs; chained there by his own community. We might wonder why he was not happy to see Jesus. I guess Jesus represented more than just the unknown and unfamiliar.

I was reading this week that ours is a generation of self-inflicted wounds, and it's a tragedy that many go through life disliking themselves. More of the Good News is that when Jesus found *Legion*, a new relationship was begun with God, and a new relationship was begun with himself. When *Legion* learned that God loved and accepted him, then he began to love and accept himself. This healing process also meant that *Legion* could be reconciled with those who judged and banished him. So, what we see here is not just that there is reconciliation with God and self, but also with the community of neighbours.

Jesus demonstrates His power over evil forces, proves that no one is beyond His saving and healing touch, and that everyone/anyone; whatever our circumstance; can be healed and redeemed. Does it bring you comfort to know that God finds us wherever we are? In the end though, it is up to us to accept God's offer to come into our hearts and lives. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock", Jesus promises. If we are unable to open that door, we remain lost.

After *Legion* was found and healed, his neighbours came and discovered him sitting at Jesus' feet "dressed and in his right mind; and [then] they were afraid". Well, what were they afraid of? It turns out that his neighbours were also uncomfortable with God, wanting little to do with God. The Light of Christ shone too brightly on them, and because they were not facing their own "inner demons" they weren't ready to accept the God that *Legion* did. So, Jesus got into a boat and left, and the newborn Christian wanted to get into the boat with Him. But Jesus had other plans for *Legion*. "'Return home', Jesus commanded, '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".

Wow! This is such a powerful story, and *you and me are so lucky that God has found us*

and that we have accepted Jesus. Just as Jesus says, we now have the wonderful opportunity to share this miraculous story with those who have never heard it, or as Marcus Borg writes, to “meet Jesus again for the first time”. That Jesus meets us at our greatest needs, is the main point of the story. At the end of the story, the man is made whole. He is delivered from his demons; released from this terrible burden; and completely healed and redeemed. As a result, “He went away, proclaiming throughout the town how much Jesus had done for him”. He was now both a follower and a witness for Jesus.

When we look at our world today, it is obvious that there are a lot of things holding us captive. They truly can be immeasurable. But here, of course, is the Good News at the heart of this story; Jesus came to free us from these things. Jesus came to free us from all those things that hurt us and separate us from one another. Jesus came to set us free from sin, death, and the demons in our world, just as he crossed the Sea of Galilee on that stormy night, to free this poor Gerasene man.

Because we are baptized, the demons that still swirl around us no longer define us. I believe Christ is Lord over them all. The Gerasene man is proof of that, and so are we. We are baptized children of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever. I think that’s proof enough for us to share with others how much God has done for us and what God can and will do for them; the proof of the peace, love, and joy we have in Jesus. To God be the glory. Amen.

This coming Sunday, June 29th, is the first of our outdoor worship services at 10:00am.

July’s services are at Lucknow Presbyterian Church.

August’s services are at South Kinloss Presbyterian Church.

I pray that you may know God’s many blessings over the summer months.

Rob