

Pentecost 4, 2010
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Luke 8: 26 – 39

The sermon text today is the Gospel lesson, found in Luke 8. I invite you to keep the text handy, because we will be looking at it in some detail here in a minute.

For now, let's begin with prayer:

Lord Jesus in days of old you brought healing to a man possessed by demons. You changed his life, and through him you brought change to his whole community. Lord Jesus, on this day, bring forgiveness and healing to each one of us. Whatever troubles we carry, take them from us. Whatever burdens we bear, lift them. Then use us we pray, to bring your joy and healing to this world in which we live; Lord Jesus in your name, AMEN.

Luke chapter 8, the healing of a man who lived in the country of the Gerasenes, near the sea of Galilee. Let's go through this text, step by step, and see what we can learn.

First of all, verse 27, Jesus steps out of the boat, and “a man of the city who had demons met Him.” Now this may be a minor point, but I think it's worth making—about demons. People today just seem fascinated by this sort of stuff, movie after movie and TV show after TV show is all about the occult, and the demonic, and ooh, look kids, it's in the Bible, so it must be real! Well, ok, what exactly *does* the Bible say about demons, anyway. What for example do we learn about demons, from the lesson today? Two things, I think. One, there are in fact forces out there we humans don't understand, they're up to no good and they do mean to harm us. But two, Jesus wins.

Jesus wins, and it's not like it's a contest either, it's not like it's even close, Jesus wins! In the movies, you just never know, it's a fight to the final scene and even then you just know the demons will be back in the sequel, but in the Bible? Verse 31. Jesus shows up, and the demons surrender. They give up, and they *beg* for mercy.

A lot of people out there spend a lot of time these days worrying about what the Devil is up to. I don't. Not to be flippant, but I don't. I don't *care* what the Devil is up to—because I know what my God is up to, and I know my God wins. Jesus is about the forgiveness and healing of the entire world, Jesus is about the salvation of every person here today, and Jesus wins. Ta-da! The Word of God shows up, the demons surrender, what, do you want to make this harder than it is? “A struggle between Good and E-vil”—well it's entertaining in the movies, maybe; but do you want to be entertained here or do you just want to be saved? I want to be saved, and so I'll simply trust Jesus, and leave it at that. If the Lord is *not* in my life, then even the smallest problem is too much, it's overwhelming. But when Jesus shows up in my life, then the mightiest demons run away. So my advice? Don't worry about whether or not demons exist, don't worry what they're like or what they're up to. Simply let your heart be opened to the presence of Jesus, and let the Lord win.

Verse 30. Jesus asks the man, What is your name? And he answered Legion—for many demons had entered him. Legion of course is a word borrowed from the Roman military, a legion in the Roman army of old had a full compliment of something like 6000 men. To take this verse literally, is the man therefore saying he has exactly 6000 demons inside him? Maybe. Maybe, but I'd put it this way, the man is saying, I have more problems than I can count.

So do I, by the way, and maybe you too, I have more problems than I can count. Bad habits that I've been meaning to break for decades now. Apologies to offer, and maybe apologies to accept. Grudges to let go of, anger to release, relationships to repair. Stress at home, stress at work; stress when I look at the bills to be paid, stress when I look at the laundry. Stress when I realize I'm closing in on 50 and there's a lot of things I once dreamed of doing in life, I know now I'm never going to get to. Frustration, sadness, despair, you name it—more problems than I can count. Maybe you too.

But again, when Jesus shows up. The Son of God took all our sins, all our sadness and despair—He took it, and carried it all with Him to the cross. He died to forgive us, then rose again to open before us the way of everlasting life, and He is here with you now. Today. And He always will be. More

problems than you can count? Ok, me too, and this guy in Luke 8 certainly. *Lots* of problems, but one Lord Jesus Christ, who is Savior of us all, and the one to turn to any crisis or any need. The One Son of God, come to set you free, from everything.

Verse 37. Very interesting. *Very* interesting, if Jesus is so great, why did the people of the village all tell Him to leave? If Jesus is so wonderful, and what He does is so great, why at the end of verse 35 were people afraid? There may be a couple ways of looking at this, here's one, let me ask you: Think of some problem or other you have—a sin that you have carried, a bad habit you're in. Think about giving it to Jesus. What is more frightening to you—the chance that He won't take it from you? Or the likelihood that He will? If you take this Jesus seriously, you know right now He means to change you. And for many people, that's kind of scary. Easier, more comfortable, to stay the same, but Jesus won't let you do that. You know that. He'll take your problem, He'll take your life, He'll change you forever so what. You want the Lord to leave?

And if the Lord stays and changes you, you also know there will awkward and occasionally uncomfortable changes in your relationship with others. This man in Luke 8 was healed, and for whatever reason his friends and family were not quite ready for that. In the back of my mind I can hear Dr.

Phil talking about co-dependency. Yes? One tip. Pray about your own actions and attitudes, your own sins and your own need for forgiveness—God is ready willing and able to answer that prayer today. Pray about your relationship with others, God's response has to factor them in too; and that might take a while longer. So, be sure to pray for a bit of patience as well.

Finally, verse 39, Go home, and tell everyone how much God has done for you. God created you in the first place, He gave you life and the good things of this world. God in His mercy sent Jesus to suffer die and rise again for you, for your salvation—you are a sinner too, but beloved by a God who chooses to forgive, and who seeks a chance to change your life now and forever. You have been met by this Jesus again today, and He cannot, will not let you go. You think maybe somebody else needs to hear this too? The Good News of the Gospel—Christ has died Christ is Risen Christ will come again—think anyone else is dying to know that? Like maybe the whole world? Go and tell them what God has done for you, and let's meet back together next week, and celebrate it all over again.

And we pray this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord,
AMEN.