

²⁶They sailed down to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across from Galilee. ²⁷When Jesus stepped ashore, a man from the town met him. He was possessed by demons and for a long time had not worn any clothes. He did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before him, and said with a loud voice, “What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torment me!” ²⁹For Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. In fact, the unclean spirit had seized him many times. He was kept under guard, and although he was bound with chains and shackles, he would break the restraints and was driven by the demon into deserted places.

³⁰Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

He said, “Legion,” because many demons had gone into him. ³¹They were begging Jesus that he would not order them to go into the abyss. ³²A herd of many pigs was feeding there on the mountain. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. ³³The demons went out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

³⁴When those who were feeding the pigs saw what happened, they ran away and reported it in the town and in the countryside. ³⁵People went out to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet. He was clothed and in his right mind, and the people were afraid. ³⁶Those who saw it told them how the demon-possessed man was saved. ³⁷The whole crowd of people from the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were gripped with great fear.

As Jesus got into the boat and started back, ³⁸the man from whom the demons had gone out begged to be with him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹“Return to your home and tell how much God has done for you.” Then he went through the whole town proclaiming what Jesus had done for him.

To grab people’s attention, stories need detail. The setting matters. Did the shipwreck happen out in the middle of the ocean during a storm, or did it take place one hundred yards from shore due to ineptitude? The people in the story matter. What’s their background? What’s their relationship with each other? And, of course, what happens matters, down to every little detail. The best storytellers capture the scene for us, whether they were there or not.

Luke serves as our storyteller today, not making up a narrative or telling what he himself saw. Instead, like an investigative journalist, Luke gathers all the details so he can describe exactly how things were. And in showing how things were that day, he reveals our Lord’s heart for his people.

Jesus and his disciples were in gentile territory, on the banks the Sea of Galilee. These were not the safest places for a group of Jews. They certainly weren’t the most welcoming either. But

there was a welcoming party for Jesus as he stepped onto shore. One man. A man who was demon possessed. A man who had been demon possessed for a long time. A man who had been demon possessed for a long time, and because of his ailment, was forced to live in the graveyard. That's who came to meet him. It seems this man had played with Satan and witchcraft, and was now suffering because of it.

Naked this man came to Jesus and fell at his feet. But when he opened his mouth, the voice of another spoke: "What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torment me!" How did he know that Jesus was the Son of God? At this point, even his disciples had not fully grasped that idea. The words spoken here were not the words of a rational man. The voice might have sounded like his, but it was the demon inside of him that was speaking. This demon knew who Jesus was and knew that Jesus could drive him out of the man. Up to this point, it seems, he had held unrestrained power over the man, causing the man to convulse whenever he wanted and sending him into a frenzy that would even break out of the chains the townspeople put him in. In those fits of rage, the man would be led out to deserted places. This man was owned. He was a slave.

But Jesus did not retreat from this despicable sight of a human being. He asked the man his name. Of course, the demon within the man spoke again: "Legion." Many demons had had been using this man as their punching bag. They had driven him past the edge of despair to complete and total surrender.

But now their free ride seemed to be threatened. The demons within this man clearly knew what Jesus had the power to do, and they didn't want him to do it. They didn't want to be cast into hell. They wanted to continue to make hell of earth. Begging, they requested Jesus send them into a nearby herd of pigs. And when he obliged, these demons, bent on destruction, rushed the herd off the cliff into the Sea of Galilee. This tells you everything you need to know about how depraved the devil and his demons are.

Jesus removed what was contaminating the man. As the pigs rushed down into the lake, we can't help but be reminded of the lake of fire God uses to describe hell in Revelation. Sin. Satan. Everything contaminating the man was removed. The people who saw this, probably the pig farmers, left to tell other people what they saw. And when they returned, they found the demon possessed man as they hadn't seen him in years, back to normal, clothed and sitting at Jesus' feet.

The story of this man is not all that different than our own story. No, you and I may not have been under demon possession, but understand that Satan has more tools in his belt than just possession. He finds his way to influence the world, and you can see so much destructive thinking that places a person unknowingly under his power. Whether it's making life too easy and convincing people they don't need God or making life so hard that people can't believe a

loving God could exist, the devil held all of us in our sins. We were captives. Salves. Spiritually naked and helpless.

But Jesus stepped off the boat for us. He came into this world to be man's liberator, to remove all the gunk and rot that had ruined the souls of all people. And that filth and stain was not placed on pigs, but on himself, the one who endured hell for us, the one who shouted out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", the one gave up his life to atone for our sins. To the lake of fire he went, so that we didn't have to.

This brings about a change in us, just as dramatic as the man whose oppression was cast off him. We do not live as slaves anymore. We do not live as if we have to do this and that to cleanse ourselves. We have been cleansed. We've been set free from the toxicity of Satan and sin at the cross.

And who is this freedom for? Whose sins did our Lord die for? As we see here, he died for the most gentile of people. He died for the greatest of sinners, even the ones who have placed themselves under full control of the devil. He died for you and me.

But those set free from something are also set free for something. You see it in those who are survivors of violence coming out of it with a renewed purpose to fight that violence. You see it in people who have been set free from addiction carrying the leading voices to help others. When we are set free from something, we don't just sit and do nothing. We are motivated to act. We are motivated to do something with our newfound freedom.

Luke records that the people from all over the region came to see the man who had been cleansed. And what did they find? They found the situation perfectly fixed. Jesus had not just started the man down the road to recovery. There was no twelve-step process. Jesus healed him completely.

But in seeing this, the people asked Jesus to leave. Why? How could they not see that Jesus could help them? How did they not invite him to stay with them forever? Because if Jesus could fix what was broken in this guy, he could fix what was broken in all of them. But they didn't want him to stick around. Why? Because standing in the presence of the holy is terrifying. Sure, he could help them, but he could also judge them for everything wrong they had done. Jesus pushed back, right? He told them he'd never leave, didn't he? No! Jesus gave them what they wanted. He got in the boat and left them. How could he do that to them? Didn't he love them enough to cleanse them?

Listen to the rest. The cleansed man, having been rescued by Jesus, wanted nothing more than to follow his Lord and Savior. But Jesus didn't let him on the boat. This man had been set free from the demons. Now it was time to do something with his freedom. "Return to your home and tell how much God has done for you." This was his new mission, to tell all those people who were too afraid to stand in Jesus' presence what he had done.

People love the wonders of God, until they get too close to him. They have no problem staring off at the sunset sky. They have no issue enjoying the company of their fellow created beings. But having communion with God, without the buffer of his creation? Now, that's too hard. There are many who hear about Jesus and they don't hate him. But that doesn't mean they are unafraid to come before God. They avoid churches, not because they think churches are filled with hypocrites, but because they're afraid what they hear will confirm their deepest fears: "What are you doing here? There's no salvation for you. Not anymore." I suspect all of us today have had the same fears cross our minds in these pews once or twice. People want to be rid of Jesus because they don't know how to deal with him, just like this crowd next to the Sea of Galilee. They misunderstand what a relationship with Christ entails, so they push him back onto his boat to go away.

Jesus combats those fears by sending witnesses, by visiting those still enslaved to sin through those set free. This is less scary than Jesus standing in front of them, because the messenger bringing Jesus to them is their fellow sinner. This job to bear witness belongs to each and every Christian.

But not every believer is comfortable with bearing witness to Christ. In fact, we all have fears when it comes to sharing Jesus with other people. We would rather climb into the boat with Jesus, especially when life is filled with suffering and worry. But Jesus has not called us to be with him. Not yet. For now, he gives us the ability to witness to the truth of his word as a gift. And when we neglect using this gift God gives us to be his coworkers in evangelism, we do not need to be afraid of him. We ought to confess our sins and trust those words of forgiveness that he speaks to us in his word and through our fellow believers.

And Jesus will keep putting people in front of us to minister to. But he doesn't call you to do something you can't do. He calls you to live as someone set free from something and set free to do something. So, return and tell. To announce freedom for those still under the illusion of slavery. To cleanse the unclean with the blood of Christ. Every day you are not with Jesus is another day to witness to that truth until he takes you and all his faith-filled people home. Amen.