

## Luke 8: 26-39 “The Devil in the Details”

With Pentecost and Trinity Sunday behind us, we are now back in the season in the church year called Ordinary Time. It’s the “in-between season,” the days between the special seasons such as Advent and Christmastide, the season of Lent, the Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday we just celebrated last week.

The Scripture passages we hear throughout Ordinary Time set focus on the day-to-day life of Jesus, which is anything but ordinary, as we can see in today’s reading from the Gospel of Luke. They invite us to explore what it means, from a practical standpoint, to follow Jesus and how it impacts us both personally and socially. The stories focus on building a community of people who would carry on, in our ordinary life, the extraordinary work of Love that Jesus taught us with his life. Moving back into Ordinary Time, we will find ourselves traveling alongside Jesus and discover that the ordinary is in the extra ordinary, and vice versa. We live as people of faith, “new creations in Christ,” not just on Christmas and Easter, but also during the times in between where most of life takes place.

So, let us join Jesus back on this journey, through the lens of the Gospel of Luke. The Church tradition has called the writer of this Gospel and the Book of Acts Luke. Luke writes, right at the beginning of the Gospel, that he very carefully tried to write an orderly account of the life, the ministry, and the teachings of Jesus, and included many miracle stories, like the one that’s given to us today.

But, what a bizarre story! I don't know how this story of Jesus having an extended interaction with demons struck you. Now Faith is not about our ability to believe something that we find unbelievable; rather, it is about trusting the truth revealed in the story. What is the truth Luke hopes to convey to us here? Miracle stories are like the gospel in miniature. The challenge for us is that it is hard to get our modern heads around those miracle stories. What are we to make of it? With all our knowledge about the natural world and human psychology, it's easy to miss the point of the story. Like, we know the ancients blamed demons and unclean spirits for any illness, so this man simply must have had a severe behavioral health issue. No, that would be too simplistic. There is more to the story, and the details in the story carry meaning, filling the picture; the devil is in the details.

So, let us look at the story little closer. Jesus and the disciples had sailed the Sea of Galilee to the other side, arriving at the country of the Gerasenes, opposite Galilee. This is Jesus going beyond his native region and the Jewish land of Galilee? They have stepped into the Gentile territory.

As soon as they land, they are met by a man from the city, so he was a Gentile, an outsider to the Jews, the people of God. And this man, for a long time hadn't worn clothes and lived in the tombs, which not only made him unclean in Jewish thought but an outcast in his own society. This places him at the lowest of low in social acceptability; he's a hopeless case, really. And yet, Jesus reaches out and orders the unclean spirit tormenting the man to

leave him. When the man talk back, Jesus asks What is your name? Legion, which means a large unit, comes the answer from the multitudes of demons living in the man. Interestingly, Luke then write “THEY” begged Jesus not to send THEM back into the Abyss, the place where many demons were believed to be imprisoned. There is the Devil in the details. In asking their name, Jesus called out the demons, separating them from the humanity of the man. Having been named, the demons ask Jesus to let them go into the herd of swine. In Jewish thought, swine were unclean and worthless creatures, and Jesus allows them to drive themselves to self-destruction. This dramatic visual demonstration of the exorcism is Luke’s demonstration of Jesus victory over anything that mess with the humanity of God’s children. No matter how distorted our lives may have become, Jesus recognizes our humanity and acts to save it.

Jesus’s knows so well our True Self, the image of God, as God created us. He knows, too, where in our being the devil lurks, where in our being the demons have invaded, taken over and have made their home, whether physical, psychological, or spiritual. Jesus does not confuse the devil that is in the details of our lives and who we truly are. What demons can we name, living in the details of our lives? AND what demons do we see that is messing with our world, that is meant to be God’s beloved community?

Jesus's love for us is so strong that it penetrates through the demon possessed part of us to reach and touch and dig us out, to restore us. That's "Sozo," the Greek word that means both "to Heal" and "to Save."

The devil, or the demons or unclean spirit, is the name we call whatever that gets in the way of our being who we are meant to be, living how we are called to live, loving God and our neighbor as ourselves; in other words, whatever that diminishes our God given humanity: false values and false gods and misplaced priorities... which is also called "sin." Here is the gospel in miniature, the picture of Jesus who saves us from sin. That holds true for our individual personal lives and our collective life in community.

For the dynamics between fiercely loving Jesus and us, the demon-possessed beloveds, is not to be contained just in our personal relationship with God. Having been healed by Jesus and restored to our God-given humanity, we are empowered to Love others who are just as demon possessed as we are, and usually, it's a whole lot easier to see the devils lurking in others' lives than in our own.

Can we love that person who seems beyond hope, who seems so married to the devil living in them? Some folks literally appear to be the devil itself, don't they? In such case, can we have hope that such person is still redeemable, as Jesus did?

When we are confronted with the devil residing in others, making the person so unacceptable, so easy to hate, so easy to judge and condemn, can

we name, as Jesus did, what's making that person appear so to us, and have the Love that penetrates through all that muck?

As the embodiment of Christ's love for the world today, we believe in this transforming love of Christ, and love like that changes the world, healing one demon possessed life at a time. Isn't that the gospel truth?

The man who was healed wanted to join the travelling band of Jesus and his disciples, but Jesus told him to return home, which is in the Gentile territory and tell everyone there how much God has done for him. To the resident of the city of Gerasene who only knew him in his demon-possessed state, his transformed life would speak volumes.

- What do our lives, as Christ's church and as individuals touched by the love of Christ, what do our lives speak volumes of?

But the swineherds who were the eyewitnesses to the man's transformation and the town-folks who came to find out what was happening became afraid. Huh, why would that be? You would think they'd be relieved that this man, who had been such a handful of a demoniac has been healed. But no. Instead of rejoicing, or even just a bit relieved for the man, they were overcome by fear; do we have to now let him "re-enter" the society? When the man was roaming in the wilds and living in the "safe confines" of the tomb, they knew who he was and where he belonged: at a safe distance from their daily lives. But Jesus told this man to "return

home.” Do we have to now find him home in town? Do we have to now recognize him as a neighbor? What’s the consequence of that??

The folks were okay with the man being demon possessed, and hence excluded from the society. Salvation, or healing Jesus brings is holistic, restoring us to wholeness in body, mind, spirit and relationship.

Whom do we treat, or even just regard, as someone so lost, so beyond hope, that we don’t want to believe that such person could be redeemed, lest we might have to embrace that person? When we encounter someone who seems to epitomize evil, it’s easier to say that person is a hopeless case, rather than hoping for that person to be healed. But wellbeing of others and ours are bound up together in this world, and Jesus’s boundless love is our hope.

Call to mind, if you will, the people that you think are just beyond hope. How does it feel to imagine that it is for that wretch Jesus came?

Jesus is not about choosing side; he is about saving all of us, even those whom we think are beyond hope and dismiss them as such. Jesus’ power is precisely in refusing to allow the evil to claim the life of any of us, and that’s the power of Jesus love for each of us.

If we are to follow Jesus, we are to hold onto the hope not only for the least of these but also for the worst of these. Nothing less would do. Hope that cannot overcome the worst in us offers no hope. If we follow Jesus, we too refuse to yield to the evil that seems to have taken over so much of our

society. The hope Jesus brought into our broken and suffering does not rely on our estimation of the savability (I made that word up) of any individual.

Today is Father's Day and I want to tell you about one time my very logical, rational and analytical, computer engineer of a father displayed such a hope. When I was 35, I had a rather premature midlife crisis. As is often the case for someone in such state, I made a radical decision, took a drastic action, talking my husband into it and basically ended up destroying the foundation of our young family life that we had built over the period of 10 years. If someone asked me why I did such a thing, I'd say "the devil made me do it." This involved a move from NYC where we were both gainfully employed to the rural upstate New York, where I thought I could be a happy volunteer church lady while we lived on my husband's income alone. It turned out badly for many factors I had not considered. I spare you the details, but trust me, the devil was in those details; we were in a hopeless situation and I was a helpless mess. We found ourselves in a financial dead-end and I, guilt-stricken, succumbed to an acute panic disorder, not being able to get out of bed even to take care of my daughter who had just turned 5. My parents came from Japan to help us figure out how to dig ourselves out of the mess I had created. They did not have the financial means to help us, but they struggled with us. When I could not see a way out, and my faith was nowhere to be found, it was my father who said, with determination, "It's going to be okay, because it got to be." He was not a person of faith, well, at least not in a conventional religious way. But it was his love for me

that made him refuse to accept any outcome but the restoration of my mind, body and spirit, my healing.

What devil lurks in the details of your life? Can you trust that Jesus sees through them and love the you God created? Can we follow Jesus and see through the muck that covers our neighbor's humanity and love that neighbor, empowered by God's love? We are made for the healing of one another, and for this, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit. For this we worship our triune God. Let us journey on.