

Elizabeth Presbyterian Church
Dr. Bruce A. Spear
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“The Healing Power of Jesus”

Prayer of Confession

Our Father in heaven, we know that you have invited us to be still and know that you are God. And yet we find ourselves too busy to stop and spend time with you in prayer and silence. We have sacrificed peace of mind on the altar of urgency and busyness. Thank you for bringing us here today to be still and to experience your presence in quietness and trust.

Assurance of Forgiveness

For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence you shall be strengthened."

Luke 8:26-39

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs.

When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"-- for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.)

Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country.

Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they 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. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed.

Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned.

The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

In 1942, CS Lewis wrote *The Screwtape Letters* which was a record of correspondence from a senior demon named Screwtape to his nephew a junior demon named Wormwood. The letters were intended to teach Wormwood how to improve his temptation of a young man away from God and into the service of "our father below." Lewis' point is that human beings not only struggle with the sinful desires that lurk within but also against a Devil and his demons who surreptitiously try to assist us in doubting the truth of God's word and choosing to follow sinful desires that are not pleasing to God.

I listened to this book on tape for a week in May while commuting to Elizabeth and realized that I do not give enough attention to the fact that there is a Devil and that he is trying to get me off track, lead me into temptation, and keep me from listening to the Holy Spirit.

Our story today is that of Jesus' encounter with a man who was not just tempted but entirely possessed by a legion of demons. Luke 8 is filled with accounts of Jesus' power and authority. Jesus has just come across the lake of Galilee. On the boat ride, he fell asleep, and had to be awakened by his disciples who told him a storm had come up and they were about to capsize. Jesus rebukes the wind and raging waves and they were

immediately calm, leaving the disciples to wonder who this was who commanded even the wind and the waves and they obeyed. At the end of the chapter we see Jesus healing a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. He stops to heal her even though he is on the way to heal the daughter of a man named Jairus. When he arrives at Jairus' house, the daughter is dead, but Jesus raises her up and gives her back to her amazed parents.

In between, Luke tells us about Jesus' encounter with this man possessed by a legion of demons. Jesus has gone with his disciples over to the other side of the lake of Galilee. This is Gentile territory as we will see later by the presence of a large herd of swine which according to Mark numbered 2,000. The presence of 2,000 pigs immediately lets us know that Jesus is in Gentile territory.

As soon as Jesus gets out of the boat, he is confronted by a wild man from the tombs who says, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Do not torment me."

This man has been possessed by a large number of demons for a number of years. He is naked. He will not live in a house like a normal person. He lives in the tombs and in the mountains. Mark tells us that this man was constantly screaming and gashing himself with stones. The village people have tried to subdue him with chains and leg shackles but to no avail. The man is not himself. Even the voice that comes out of this man's mouth is not his own. It is the legion of demons that recognize that Jesus is the son of the Most High God and are fearful of what Jesus might do to them.

For their part they have completely torn apart this man's life and made him into a raging idiot. As Jesus says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." These demons have given this man the opposite of an abundant life. And Jesus, who announced in Luke 4 that God had anointed him to proclaim release to the captives and set the prisoners free, sets this man free by commanding the unclean spirits to come out of him.

Jesus asks the evil spirits to give him their names. When an evil spirit is named, it loses some of its power to terrorize. Then the demons begin to negotiate their future. They realize that Jesus has the power to send them back to the abyss, where they will no longer be able to tempt human beings. They request instead to be sent into the herd of swine on the hillside. Jesus gave them permission, so they left the man and entered the swine. The swine immediately stampeded down the hillside into the lake and were drowned, all 2,000 of them.

The man, however, was immediately well and restored to his right mind. He accepted clothing and began to seem like a normal human being again. What a wonderful change. We talk about what it must be like for a blind person to have surgery and see this beautiful world for the first time. We talk about what it must feel like to regain hearing or the use of arms and legs and be able to walk, but I am not sure there was a greater or more joyful experience known to this world than for a man who had been possessed by a legion of demons to wake up and find himself thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting like himself for the first time in ages. Where the demons had come to kill, steal, and destroy, Jesus had truly come to give life and to give it more abundantly.

This, however, alarmed the swineherds. Their livelihood was in the lake. They ran back to the town where the owners of the pigs lived and told everyone what had happened. The whole town, pig owners and all, came running out to the lake. There they saw two things: their total investment of 2,000 pigs floating dead in the lake; and the demon possessed man seated peacefully, clothed, and in his right mind. The loss of the pigs mattered more than the life of the man who had been restored by Jesus, and they begged Jesus to leave their part of the country.

Jesus agreed to leave. This man who had received a new life wanted to leave with him, but Jesus asked him to stay and tell everyone what God had done for him. Mark tells us that this man did just that. He proclaimed the power of Jesus all over the Decapolis which is a large ten city area to the east of Lake Galilee and the Jordan River.

There are several applications we can make from this story to our daily lives.

The first is that while the devil comes to kill, steal, and destroy, Jesus comes so that people can have life and can have it more abundantly. Luke uses the word "saved" to refer to the man who was sitting there clothed and in his right mind. You will notice that it is translated "healed." Even our English word for salvation includes a medical word for a healing ointment, a "salve." To save is to heal and to heal is to save. Sometimes we get caught up in only the eternal aspects of the gospel, that a saved person has the promise and hope of eternal life. We forget that Jesus came to heal people as well, to restore them to a normal and happy life, to give them life more abundantly. When I was serving in Westminster they elected a lady to the deacon board who was not very well known in the congregation. One day in church, one of the older ladies became agitated and wanted to take the pulpit. I was trying to reason with her behind the chancel area while the liturgist was carrying on with the service. I finally got her to follow me out to the fellowship area where I was met by our new deacon. She said she would handle it. And so I went back up to the pulpit and was ready to preach when the choir was

done singing. What I found out that day was that this woman was the director of the Rainbow Center in Thornton. The Rainbow Center was a place for people recovering from mental illness to gather, find food, clothing, and friendship and encouragement on their path to healing. She loved these people and Jesus had placed her there to help them have life and to have it more abundantly, to get saved, to get healed.

The second thing we can learn from Jesus is the infinite value of the human being in God's eyes. If we were to calculate the wholesale price of 2,000 hogs, it might come up to a quarter of a million dollars. That is a lot of money to lose into the lake. But by Jesus calculations, this man's life was worth a quarter of a million dollars. Life is cheap in this modern world of ours. But God values a human life infinitely. Each human being is worth everything to God. He loves each human being enough to send his own son Jesus and even allow him to be killed on a cross in order to save the human race. Let us never undervalue any human being regardless of how poorly they are doing in life.

The last thing we can learn from Jesus and from the rest of Scripture is to be on guard against the evil one. The temptation he uses to entice us away from God's path is always designed to sound and feel like the abundant life. But in reality the devil is a liar. What he really intends to do is to steal, kill, and destroy. He is a murderer from the beginning and a liar, the father of all lies. He will even disguise himself as an angel of light, using all kinds of lying wonders, and wicked deceptions. His power is to lead people away from God and to their own destruction.

He was pleased when this week when a 25-year-old man from East St. Louis shot his girlfriend to death in the middle of a busy freeway before killing himself, all while his 7-year-old daughter watched from the car. That is the Devil's kind of news story, and yet he presents himself to us as one who wants to make us happy, help us get our way, help us have it all. We need to see through his deception and guard against his lies.

Take a minute to read slowly through the following passages which contain guidance as to how we are to resist the Devil:

1 Peter 5:8-11 **Discipline yourselves, keep alert.** Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. **Resist him, steadfast in your faith...**

James 4:7 **Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**

Ephesians 6:11-17 **Put on the whole armor of God**, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but... against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten **the belt of truth** around your waist, and put on **the breastplate of righteousness**. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim **the gospel of peace**. With all of these, take **the shield of faith**, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take **the helmet of salvation**, and **the sword of the Spirit**, which is **the Word of God**.

1 John 4:4 **The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.**

Romans 16:20 **The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet.**

It is said that when Martin Luther felt oppressed by the devil, he would take courage by shouting, "I am baptized!" In that way he grounded his confidence in God's external, objective act of drawing him into the Christian family through the water and the word of baptism. Similarly, the names and claims that the voices of this world may shout at us do not have the last word. We can declare that God claims us once, again, and always as his own beloved children. (from David J. Lose)

CS Lewis tried to warn people about the deceptiveness of the devil. He said that the devil was determined to create a world where "everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance, and resentment." Who is winning in your life?