

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

THIS LITTLE PIGGY, A BIBLE STORY

Luke 8:26-39

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Analysis by Joseph Justus van der Sabb

26Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27As 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. 28When 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" – 29for 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.) 30Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. 31They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

32Now 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. 33Then 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.

34When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 35Then 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. 36Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been

possessed by demons had been healed. 37Then 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. 38The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39Return 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.

Intro1: Also, cf. Romans 7:14-8:39 (No really, go read it.)

Intro2: A curious tale which appears in each of the Synoptic Gospels, this carefully crafted Lukan version is notable for its structure and symmetry. Now, we've known this popular Bible Story since we were kids: The poor man is possessed by a hissing mob, a legion, of demons. The demons have left everyone else in town alone and are apparently content to torture this one pitiful soul. Due to this infestation, he's now naked, powerful, raging, drooling, swinging a human jawbone in his ape-like arms, broken chains hanging from his wrists, hollering and howling in the desert caves. An unhuman animal. Remember? And when the demons get their eviction notice from Jesus, the terms of surrender result in a swine massacre-the pigs think they're lemmings or penguins! Oh, if pigs could fly! This is such a great story. For kids. But we grown-ups live in the age of Freud's successors and neuroscience and brain scans. We have proper terms, you know, medical terms, for this unwell man and his symptoms. We know better. Or do we? Wait, you say? Hang on a minute? Do you seriously suggest we really take it at face value that there were literally "many" real demons there who really actually tortured that man and who then really truly temporarily but fatally infested a herd of, Mark notes, two thousand pigs, give or take a few? Golly-gosh. Seems a bit, well, far-fetched,

doesn't it? I mean, I've known this little piggy to have roast beef, but ... this little piggy is infested by a talkative suicidal demon hoard? Hello! But there it is, this Bible Story, its corners so well-rounded, its parallels so parallel, appearing as it does like Scene 17 in a B-grade movie about Jesus. Who goes near this one?

DIAGNOSIS: Scary Monsters

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Scary Monsters out There*

There are a lot of terrible things in the world: war, taxes, disaster, disease and death. But... compared to Monsters... yeah, Monsters. Not beasts with fangs. Not urban legends. Real Monsters. I'm talking about humans gone bad. Feral men. Vicious women. Rotten fruit. Malformed. People wrenched away from the image of God. Bent and broken. The Gerasene possessed by demons: owned, alone, unclean, outcast, dirty and naked, feared yet also fearful, adrift, surrounded always by death and its glosses, subsisting on the liminal boundaries of the world, yearning for freedom, shunned by community, suffering the power of others performed upon his own body. Neither truly animal nor truly human. And perversely proud of it. That kind of Monster.

Did demons exist? Do they now? Monsters? Really? Well, what is our baseline for what is 'monstrous'? The DSM*? What Mom and Dad whispered to us? The Brothers Grimm? Hollywood? The Vatican? Osama or Obama? Yeah, war and taxes and disease and disaster are pretty bad. But that is nothing compared to the Monster who is a man enslaved to sin, the Monster who is a woman controlled by human nature. All creation groans and cries out with pain while these Monsters roam the earth.

The Gerasene man was lucky, all he had was a few thousand pesky

demons.

*Diagnostic and Statistics Manual: the American Psychiatric Association's definitive publication of mental disorder and disease.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Scary Monsters in Here*

Well, come on. It's grief, sure, but it's good grief. Inevitable grief. Hey, it's Natural, for crying out loud. This is Human Nature we're talking about. This thing we're born with and which we inherit and which we learn from our roots on up. It is how we are and how we mostly want to be. And not all of our demons are SO scary. And anyway, we have better names for them than 'Legion.' Let's see... over here there's Holy Violence, right next to her sister Acceptable Violence. Rightness. Pride. Purity. Chastity. Profit. Alms-giving. Prayer. Sacrifice. Details. Details. Respectability. Honor. Righteous Indignation. Diligence. Ambition. Power. Truth. God-pleasingness. We don't like to use the name 'demon' around here, it's so old-fashioned. Would you like a cup of tea? We are very proud of what we do around here. So... that's Pharisee Squad ... umm, if you come over here, we'll go ahead and introduce some of the more popular members of Team Hedon. Here's Lust. Gluttony. Hate. Unforgiveness. Anger. Pleasure. Selfish Indignation. Impurity. Greed. Covetousness. Apathy. Moral laxity. Slippery-slope-iness. Impatience. Indifference. Idleness. Idolatry. Permissiveness. And then, down the back, you'll see where the junior squad is warming up... Welcome to Human Nature. We're all here.

Real demons? Fake demons? Illusions and figments? Hardly. We are driven by these whips. Driven into the wilderness (8:29). We are possessed-owned-by these demons and it's true whether or not they came up from Corridor 9 in Hell itself.

Jesus, who was led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness (4:1), steps from that wilderness into my wilderness. A sandal crunching on loose gravel, a warm breeze off the water. There he is. Him. And now there is a part of me—the part that owns me, runs me, is me—that wants to fend him off with a jawbone and scream: “Jesus Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? I beg you, don’t punish me!” (8:28), and then “Leave now and never come back!” (8:37).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Scary Monsters Forever

Without the Spirit of God, this is as good as it gets. Let’s be honest. It’s not that good—remember that whole arm-swinging, hollering thing?

Paul calls it “slavery to sin” and reminds us that to be controlled by Human Nature results in death (Rom. 8:6). The monstrous dominance [demonic lordship?] of Human Nature. Luke gives us this visceral image of the homeless man, face twitching, so lost in the wilderness of his mind that he can’t even yearn to come home.

Who, oh who, can save a wretch like me?! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death?

PROGNOSIS: The Spirit of God

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Forever

Man, faced with Human Nature, wallows fatally in it, basking in every lie, itching on every muddy post.

Pigs, faced with Human Nature, will stampede to their own watery deaths to be rid of its polluting stench. (May the Faithful Departed be welcomed outside the Pearly Gates by Balaam’s ass, Lassie and the two thousand squealing swine who would not endure the affliction of Man’s demons; choosing the depths over

participation in the ongoing slavery of God's children. They too have "groaned with all creation to be free from the slavery of decay and yearned to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God." Doubt it not.)

Jesus, the Son of the Most High God, faced with Human Nature, will leap into the abyss and bear it to the very bottom and nail it there. Good riddance. Jesus, like the filthy pigs, would rather fall into the depths than perpetuate the slavery of God's children. Even if that means the waters close over and the surface grows still. Even when the cost of such an exercise is that the Son of the Most High God must die. The slavery must end.

The Spirit breathes over the water. She blows and blows, gusts and eddies. A strong east wind. What is hidden is revealed. What is lost is found. The One who is dead is raised.

Risen from death, Jesus and the Spirit of God make their move. They intercede before the Father. They take the slaves of sin, banish the demons ... and the slaves are born again to be the children of God. The Spirit of God takes control.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *In Hearts*

The man is now Spirit led, not demon driven. Seated at the feet of Jesus, the former maniac demoniac (FMD) bewilders all who knew of him previously. Not naked. Not raving. Not violent. Not himself. He is a new man. He has been set free from the slavery to Human Nature, the slavery to decay that afflicts all creation and he now shares in the glorious freedom of the children of God. "Those who live as the Spirit tells them to, have their minds controlled by what the Spirit wants [and this ...] results in life and peace" (Romans 8:5b-6). The FMD is having, shall we say, a pretty good day.

Also, cf. Romans 7:14-8:39

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *To Distant Horizons*

On the lakeshore at Gerasa, we are now watching a new scene. Someone runs up to Jesus and begs him not to punish him, to leave him alone, to take this Authority elsewhere, anywhere. But we are not looking at the Gerasene demoniac. It is someone else. Just a “normal” guy. One of the worried townspeople. But now we know better. He is ugly, malformed, possessed by Human Nature. With all the horror that entails. He does not live as the Spirit tells him to. Which is bad, very bad news. Monsters are still abroad in the land. And it is not just this one spokesman. The place is crawling with these critters. Everywhere you look, you see the twitching, flinching abomination of Human Nature. Who will intercede for them? Who will argue their case? Who will bear them tidings of great joy?

The FMD sits at the feet of Jesus. “Jesus, let me come with you!” Has he already seen what he will be up against if Jesus is not by his side? Of course he has. He’s been lost but now is found. He’s the FMD! Now it is an urgent plea: “Jesus, let me come with you! PLEASE!”

Though Jesus left that day, the Spirit did not. And the FMD stayed too. More now than just a story teller. More than just a pawn in a story. He has a new life to live and new fruit to bear.

Ok, there are whiffs of zombies and vampire hunters here, I’ll admit it, but FMD soon had allies. An age later, he still does. The Spirit keeps taking slaves of sin, pulling them through the depths and bringing them out again: Children of God. They are bonded into communities by the God they call “Dad. Papa.” These are the glorious Children of God, and they lack for nothing. And they push back against Human Nature to this very day, wherever they find it, especially in themselves, with the strength they

are given. They step from wilderness into wilderness, following the Spirit's leading. They are not condemned. They are set free. One of the first to be freed of his demons left his words behind to fortify any who were taking the fight to the Monster. I give you these words from Romans 8 now:

31What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long;

we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Oink! Oink! (That's Pig for "Alleluia, Praise ye the Lord!")
and then,
Oui, Oui, Amen!