

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

ENCOUNTERING THE HOLY

Luke 8:26-39

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Analysis by Robin Morgan

26 Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 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. 28 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"— 29 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.) 30 Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. 31 They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. 32 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. 33 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. 34 When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 35 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. 36 Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. 37 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. 38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 “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.

DIAGNOSIS: Alienated by Evil

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Far from Home*

The moment Jesus steps on to the land of the Gerasenes, he encounters a man possessed by demons, Luke tells us. The man is naked, living among the tombs, not in a house, alienated from society and from himself. The evil in this man’s life is not only personal, but also has affected the communities from which he’s come. He can no longer live among his own people and they, in turn, lack what gifts he had to offer that community. All societies are careful to keep their distance from unstable individuals, lest they upset the delicate balance that holds the community together.

What demons in our own lives alienate us from those we love and with whom we live? How are our communities diminished because we are bound by some evil that keeps us walking among the dead instead of participating in the life that God created us to live?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Encountering Jesus*

The man falls down before Jesus and shouts at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Do not torment me!” when Jesus commands the demons to come out of him. (vv. 28-29) Are these words the cry of the man or

the cry of the demons? The identity of this man is so wrapped up in the evil that has engulfed him that we don't know and he may not have known himself. The internal conflict of wanting to be healed, yet terrified of the change and the consequences of that change, leaves him prostrate on the ground before the Son of the Most High.

Haven't we felt at times that Jesus is more torment than joy? We can get so comfortable with our own evil that we don't even see it for what it really is. When Jesus' presence shows true character of our bondage, we turn away to avoid the truth.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Circling the Abyss*

Luke tells us the evil in this man's life is Legion, a statistical designation rather than a name. The evil is in complete control of this man. As the demons beg Jesus not to order them back to the abyss, so, too, this man's life hangs in the balance. If no one intercedes on his behalf, he will end up in the abyss with the evil that has engulfed him. A terrifying thought for us all.

PROGNOSIS: Holy Overcoming Evil

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Rejected, Yet Raised*

Thankfully, the evil within us and surrounding us is not God's last word about us. Jesus not only overcomes the demons in this story on behalf of the possessed man, he foreshadows his ultimate victory in Luke 9:21: "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." Though not the usual actions one expects from the heir to the throne, his willingness to go to the abyss in place of the possessed man and in our place dismantles ultimate evil once and for all.

He opens the door for new creation life for us all. Jesus allows himself to undergo great suffering, be rejected by the powers of the day and be killed so that not only the possessed man in the country of the Gerasenes, but even you and I can be raised to new life with him.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Encountering Jesus a Second Time*

God through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection invites all of us to trust that he did, indeed, ultimately defeat evil in the world, including the evil that holds us in bondage. He frees us from sin, guilt and shame that drive us away from home and gives us, instead, his relationship with the Father, his power over evil, his love for the world. "I have commanded that the unclean spirit come out—let me heal you," Jesus says to us. "Trust that I am the Son of the Most High God who gave myself that we might live together today, tomorrow and into eternity."

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Taking the Holy Home*

When the man, clothed and in his right mind, asks to stay with Jesus, the Lord tells him, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you" (v. 39). His cure is complete, he can go home to his community and his family with a new identity and a new purpose—to tell everyone what God has done for him. With the man of the Gerasenes, we can say, "We were as good as dead and we were raised to new life today, tomorrow and into eternity. Jesus, the Son of the Most High God, has done this for us and he will do it for you. Trust that he has overcome evil on your behalf and opens for you the way to a whole new relationship with the Father. Let him cast the demons out of your life, so that you, too, can go home ."