

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Declare What God Has Done

Luke 8:26-39

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Paul Jaster

26 Then [Jesus and his disciples] arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 As [Jesus] 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: A Legion of Demons

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Real Demons

Sometimes the greatest demons are inside of us. "Sorry," people often say after an outburst of anger, grief or rage. "I could not help it. I lost control." And what they say is true. There are naked, gruesome forces inside of us greater than ourselves.

Today we go with Dr. Jesus as he makes a house call in a foreign land. Jesus-the-Jew is entering foreign, non-Jewish territory. Clearly, he is crossing many great divisions. And no sooner does he step out of the boat than a man who had demons meets him shouting 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."

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Trying to Control Jesus

And here we see a bit of ancient magic. By speaking the name of Jesus, the demons are trying to control Jesus, like we so often do. We, too, would like to have Jesus at our beck and call and under our control. But, it is Jesus who commands them to speak their name. "What is your name?," Jesus asks. And he said, "'Legion' for many demons had entered him." "Legion" is not a name, it is a statistic. It stands for the 5,000 soldiers (plus auxiliaries) that made up the largest Roman military unit. In other words, the 5,000 demons mark the full severity of this man's inner torment and affliction.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Living in a Graveyard, The Depth of Our Affliction

And doesn't that happen in this day and age as well? Millions of people are tormented by forces inside themselves that they cannot control. They need help and comfort. They need people who will accept and stand by them. They need a person who will stop them in their tracks and turn them right around. They need the Savior, Jesus Christ. And unless Jesus comes to them, they will remain just another unfortunate statistic.

Embedded in baptism is an exorcism: "Do you renounce all the forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises?" Christians know that there are forces and powers inside of us that are much more than we can handle. There are demons of

doubt...hate...division...fear...anxiety...and anger, to name but just a few. That's why we don't just need a psychiatrist or a physician. We need a Savior who is no one less than Jesus, the Son of the Most High God. Without him we end up living in a graveyard (if you can call ending up in a graveyard "living").

PROGNOSIS: A Child of the Most High God

***Step 4: Initial
Prognosis
(Eternal
Solution): Jesus
Comes to Drive
the Demons Out***



Jesus comes to us to drive the demons out. He comes to us. He comes across the lake of time and distance. He comes into our foreign territory. We don't go to him. We cannot. "We cannot, by our own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ or come to him," Martin Luther says in his Small Catechism. We cannot come to him because something else holds us captive. Jesus, the Holy Son of God comes into our graveyard times and places: to clothe

us with his grace...and to break the bonds that hold us captive...and to drive the demons out with his own death and resurrection...and to drown them in the abyss of his baptismal waters.

With a good dose of Jewish humor, the Bible chuckles out the Good News of our salvation. Nothing beats the devil better than a good joke. Even a full-fledge regiment of evil is no match for Jesus. Jesus does not even have to know their names. He does not have to say a word or do a bit of magic. Deprived of their victim, the once-powerful legion disintegrates. The evil spirits enter a bunch of unclean swine—which (with all due respect to my pork producing relatives in Iowa and Minnesota) is about as worthless of an animal as a Jew can find!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): I Do Declare

And what a change takes place in the man from whom the demons left! Clothed! In his right mind! Begging to be with Jesus (as opposed to those who beg Jesus to leave for fear of him)! Proclaiming through the city how much Jesus has done for him! “Go home.” Jesus said to the homeless man now healed. “Go home, and declare how much God has done for you.”

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Returning Home, Healed and Healing

A couple of years ago, one of my daughter’s best friends from medical school went home to California. While there, she took a couple of days in order to go to downtown L.A. and stand at a busy street corner wearing a sign that said, “I am a Muslim. Ask me any question that you want.”

About 60% of the people who went by waved at her or gave her a thumbs up. A number would stop and engage her in a conversation. Most of the rest would divert their eyes and go out of their way to avoid her. One woman that stopped to talk with her was a Jew. She came back the next day to stand right next to her wearing a

sign that said, "I am a Jew who loves Muslims. Ask me any question that you want."

Would you do that? Would you go to a city or country wearing a sign that says, "I am a Christian who loves Muslims and Jews. Ask me any question that you want?"

Those who have been healed by Jesus, become healers, too. They continue the ministry Christ began. That ministry of driving demons out, especially those of anger, fear, hate and division. For as we all know, sometimes the greatest demons of them all are those that dwell within.