

Third Sunday after Pentecost

WHEN PIGS FLY

Luke 8:26-39

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7)

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

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, 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.

Note: The "double dipstick test" is a two-pronged criteria used to check whether something is good news from God. The two prongs are: 1) Is it based on Christ? 2) Does it give the benefits of Christ to the hearers so that their consciences are comforted, giving them peace with God?

DIAGNOSIS: The Wrong Owner Has Us

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – Owned by Legion

To get to the country of the Gerasenes, Jesus and his disciples crossed the lake in a boat. During that crossing a storm endangered the disciples who woke Jesus because they expected Jesus to be bothered with the fact that they were perishing (v. 24). Jesus calmed the storm and his disciples asked each other, "Who is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and the obey him?" (v. 25). In contrast, when Jesus stepped out on land, he was greeted by a man who had never seen him yet who knew him as "Jesus, Son of the Most High God" (v. 28). Jesus commanded the winds and waves, but that did not help the disciples know who Jesus was. Jesus commanded the demons to leave the man of the city and they knew right away who Jesus was. The demons, however, were puzzled by why Jesus would even bother with them, "What have you to do with me?" (v. 28). The disciples knew Jesus but did not trust him because they did not think he was capable of doing anything for their benefit. The demons knew Jesus and also did not trust him because they knew

Jesus was capable of doing something but didn't trust that Jesus would do anything for its benefit.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Owned by Unfaith

The demons and the disciples were owned by unfaith. The demons and the disciples did not trust Jesus. To them, Jesus was not good news from God. They thought Jesus failed the “double dipstick test.” The disciples thought Jesus failed the first prong because, though they wanted him to be of benefit, they did not know him as God's Son. The demons knew Jesus was God's Son, but thought Jesus failed the second prong because Jesus would not act in a beneficial way for them. Thus, the disciples were tormented by the storm, the demons by Jesus. Neither was comforted. That is why Jesus asked the disciples, “Where is your faith?” (v. 25). That is why the demons cried, “I beg you, do not torment me” (v. 28). The people in town, when they came out to see what had happened, found the man from whom the demons had fled sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind (v. 35). “And they were afraid” (v. 35), for they did not believe Jesus was from God and they did not trust that Jesus was of any benefit to them (which is why they asked Jesus to leave them, v. 37). To the people from the town, Jesus failed both prongs of “the double dipstick.”

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Owned by Death

The man who had demons lived in the tombs (v. 27). He was owned by death because he was against God and God was against him. The disciples were afraid of being owned by death. The people of the town were afraid of Jesus. Though the disciples and the people from the town did not live in the tombs, they were as good as dead to God because they were owned by their unfaith. When people are owned by unfaith (not loving or trusting God), they are possessed, not by a relationship of love with God, but by a relationship of justice, of law. That relationship with God based on law ends in death. For God gives death to all who do

not trust God as the giver of life. Death is for those who do not trust and love God, who are against God and live in self-centered ways that continually bring harm to others. Death is the abyss that the demons named Legion wanted to avoid.

PROGNOSIS: We Are Bought with His Most Precious Body and Blood

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Possessed by Christ*

As a newborn babe Jesus landed at Bethlehem. From then on all people did was ask him to leave. Finally they forced him to leave life in this world by killing him on a cross. People killed Jesus because they did not accept that he was from God, and they refused to accept any of the benefits he offered them. They preferred the benefits they thought they got by keeping God's way of justice-not realizing that God's way of justice gives death to all people (just as they dealt God's way of justice to Jesus). But, and that's a big but, Jesus purposely came to die by God's justice, for the sake of all people, so that he could cast out the demons of unfaith and death from all people. And Jesus could cast out those demons, because God raised Jesus from the dead! Thereby God has shown us that Jesus does pass the double-dipstick test. For Jesus is from God and he does benefit us by overcoming God's justice and death.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Possessed by Faith*

By his death and rising, Jesus casts out unfaith and death from all people. He then owns all people by giving them faith in him, convincing them by his death and rising that he is from God; and convincing them that he is of benefit to them by freeing them from God's justice and death, and from demon possession, and instead, giving them God who relates to them through Christ. Through Christ, people see that God relates to them with

forgiveness and the resurrection life. No longer are people afraid. No longer is the man who was possessed afraid, rather, he is in his right mind and sits at Jesus' feet (v. 35).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Possessed by the Spirit*

"The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law" (Galatians 5.17-18). The man possessed by demons was against God. He could not even be protected and preserved by God's law, for even though he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, he would break the bonds and be driven into the wilds (v. 29). But now that he was possessed by faith in Christ, he wanted to be with Jesus (v. 38). He could not please God by going back to keeping God's law. Jesus gave him a new way to live that pleased God. Jesus commissioned him to give others the new relationship with God through Jesus, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you" (v. 39). To declare how much God had done for him, the man proclaimed throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him. The man proclaimed a message that was based on Christ, and that gave people the benefits of Christ-being in their right minds, at peace with God, and sitting at the feet of Jesus. He was no longer possessed by fear of God or God's justice and death. He got to return home and give people peace with God, forgiveness from God, eternal life from God, all because Jesus died and rose for all people.