

## **Sermon Text – Sunday, June 22, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Isaiah 65:1-9; 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Galatians 3:23-29  
Scripture for Message: Luke 8:26-39 “Conquering Demons”**

Throughout a good portion of scripture, both Old and New Testaments, we read of instances when people struggled with “demonic” forces. The Psalms are full of laments and cries for deliverance, as well as reminders that God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. The entire canon of our scripture points to the advent of a new age and the fulfillment of God’s promise to remain with us, to be our fortress and shield. That is important to remember, and the New Testament and Gospel stories would make no sense to us without what can be learned from the Old Testament. Furthermore, what we read from the Old Testament directs our attention to how ancient people dealt with the evil forces of their time.

Even if you don’t fully believe in “demonic possession” or if you aren’t sure about the whole “demon” thing, it’s possible to admit that “we wrestle against way more than just flesh and blood.” Face it, some things in this age cannot be explained by anything other than the notion that evil exists – the Christian life is partially a struggle against evil forces and for that we need a deliverer – Jesus Christ.

How do we deal with those forces today – that is a topic we should probably explore and something we are reminded of in our reading from Luke’s Gospel. Jesus, in his travels, encountered people who struggled with demonic influences in their lives, and through his power those demonic influences were eliminated. That should be our clue!

So, what can we say about this “Gerasene Demoniac?” Why is this story in Luke’s gospel, what did Jesus teach by this so-called healing? These are the questions that come to my mind when I study this particular scripture. We learn even in the first verse of what we read that the country of Gerasene or Gadarene was opposite Galilee. I think not only the opposite as across the ‘sea’ but also opposite in political and religious beliefs. Gerasene was in the region known as the “Decapolis” a region that was primarily occupied by the Gentile people – most likely of Syrian descent. Why does that matter to this story? Jesus’ primary mission, according to him was to

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the people of Judea – the Jews. Ministering then to the Gentiles would be something extra ordinary.

Nevertheless, when Jesus arrived at the country of the Gerasene's he encounters an unclean spirit and commands it to come out of the man. Several demons calling themselves "Legion" have tormented this man for a long time. Does anyone notice the parallel with the Roman Legions that have occupied the territory and "oppressed" the people? This legion of demons fully recognize who Jesus is. They call him by name, Jesus, Son of the Most High God, and they beg Jesus to leave them alone. Knowing that Jesus has the power and authority to drive them out of the man, they beg Jesus not to order them back into the abyss where Satan had imprisoned them. They beg Jesus to let them enter a large herd of swine that was feeding on the hillside, and Jesus gives them permission. Why is that important? It shows the reader that Jesus had authority over the demons, and the demons recognized that authority.

The swineherds were probably not pleased with Jesus' giving permission for the demons to occupy their herd but there is usually a cost to restoration. They ran off to tell it in the city and the country – in other words everywhere. They had lost their income source in addition to the fact that this person they knew to be "possessed" was now "freed" and that caused them fear. But why should they fear?

You see, the community had a certain amount of control over this man they knew to be possessed. Even when their attempts to keep him under guard and bound with chains and shackles had failed, the community knew what to expect from him and he stayed out of their way. But now, Jesus has driven away the demons and created a situation that was not familiar to the community. They were afraid of the unknown, afraid of the power Jesus had to disrupt the status-quo, afraid of change.

It makes me question whether the people wanted this man to remain as he had always been, controlled by "Legion?" Does the comfort of status quo make us fearful of change? Maybe that is where the saying "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't" came from. Meaning it's preferable to deal with a familiar bad person or situation, even if you don't like them, than to try

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dealing with a new one that could be worse. Essentially, it's about the comfort of knowing what to expect, even if it's unpleasant, over the uncertainty of the unknown. Jesus continually presented the community with the uncertainty of the unknown.

So, what does this have to do with the conquering of demons in this culture? Where does the thought of fears and evil thoughts come into play in this lesson? This lesson compels us to realize that evil exists in the world, and only Jesus Christ has the power to conquer demons. Only Jesus can deliver us from whatever “dark influences” we face – either personally or communally. Let's not, however, discount the fact that sometimes a person's troubles push them beyond their ability to cope or follow the Spirit's guidance, that person needs a mental health professional's care. Maybe it takes the Spirit's guidance and courage to ask for that type of help.

In this story, Jesus restores this man to wholeness – the cost to the community was in the loss of the swine herd and loss of income. This “healing” possibly cost the community social comfort, financial resources, and maybe even reputation. Letting go of the ways things have always been does come with cost. For example, when a church becomes welcoming of people along the margins, the poor, the destitute, those with addictions, or other differences, that welcoming might cause the community to be uncomfortable or it might not be financially beneficial to the church. It is however what the kingdom of God requires of us.

Regardless, God compels us to be welcoming of those with differences – that is what a church does. It can be scary though, and those are times when the demons crop up to tell us that we are foolish. The demons pop into our social consciousness to fill us with negative talk. Not only negative talk about the community and from the community but also negative talk about ourselves, about who is acceptable and who is not.

Recently I had a discussion with several colleagues about conquering the demons and fears that accompany us. We all have them – thoughts that seem to come from nowhere and nag at us, negative self-talk that discourages us, and worries about what others think of us. We sometimes think our God is far away from us and we fail to draw from God's strength to allay our fears and worries. This negative talk is sometimes what keeps a church from building a

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stronger community of faith, keeps a church from being welcoming of the strangers and aliens among us.

I wonder if what we read from Isaiah this morning is a reminder to us that God longs to be found, longs to be in a relationship with us. Isaiah's words from God remind us that we are not isolated from God or from a faithful community even if we cannot yet recognize that presence. Isaiah's words tell us that even when the people had stopped looking for God, rebelled against God – God waited and was ready to be found. The people provoked the Lord, yet the Lord waited for them and that's a big deal. Our God is ready for us even when we are not ready, we just have to say yes to the invitation, until then God / Jesus will remain waiting.

So, when we are struggling with demons, evil influences, craziness, and chaos – we need to know that Jesus is waiting for us to fall down before him and accept the deliverance he offers. Once freed, this man wanted to be with Jesus, but Jesus sent him away with an appeal for him to “Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.”

Jesus does not ask us to remain idle or stuck in the wilderness of fear and despair. I wonder if part of the journey of crossing over to wellbeing involves sharing what God has done for us. Jesus calls us to go and serve, proclaiming the good news throughout the whole earth. What does that look like and how do we help others see Jesus as a deliverer?

Does the story of the Gerasene demoniac speak to OUR day as it did its own? Absolutely! To the church which battles the demons of social evil, the message is there is hope in Jesus. To individuals for whom there is an everyday battle ongoing with the demon of depression, the message is there is hope in Jesus. To those who battle the demon of fear, the message is there is hope in Jesus. Those who fight the demon of addiction, the message is there is hope in Jesus. And to those who have so many battles going on against so many demons that their name is LEGION, the message is there is hope in Jesus.

I am thinking it takes faith, faith to realize that only through Jesus Christ is there power to deliver humanity from its demons. Faith comes through Christ; faith brings the light that drives away shadows. It is in the shadows where most of our fears and demons reside. We

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can tap into Jesus' power through prayer and the faith to believe that prayer works. The whole of our holy scriptures reminds us that God will one day restore wholeness to creation. Jesus, in his famous reading of the scroll in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry, told us that he has come to "proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and to set the oppressed free." Until we're ready for that, Jesus waits.