

**Sermon Manuscript: Luke 8:26-39**  
**Christ Defeats the Legion of Demons**  
Season after Pentecost (Proper 7) – June 19, 2022

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*They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.*

*Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"*

*"Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.*

*A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.*

*When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.*

*The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him. [NIV 2011]*

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In 1973, the movie *The Exorcist* was released amid great controversy. Some of you might be old enough to remember the movie. Some have maybe seen it. It was controversial for its fictional depiction of demon possession and the attempt by some Roman Catholic priests to cast out the demon. The movie was worldly hit at the time and the subject matter of the devil and demons has become a staple in horror movies and television programs. But most of these shows are missing something very important when it comes to this subject. They all portray the evil spirits as powerful and virtually unable to be defeated. They also include human victims who are terrorized by the demons. The thing that is missing is the most powerful thing to remember. They are missing the one person who can defeat such evil powers. Today we go to the source and see the mighty warrior who conquers these enemies that would fill us with fear. In our lesson today we see how **CHRIST DEFEATS THE LEGION OF DEMONS.**

### **1. The Man "Has Demons"**

Our account begins with Jesus stepping ashore on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. As soon as he gets out of the boat he is accosted by "*a demon-possessed man from the town.*" But what exactly is demon possession? I like how this man is described in the original language. It says: "The man had demons." Demon possession is like an infection or infestation. We might say, "The man has the measles" or "She has COVID." They are infected with a virus and you would call a doctor. Or you might say, "I have mice in my

house” or “The kitchen has cock roaches.” In this case we would call an exterminator. Demon possession is much more serious but it is basically the same thing. It is an infestation of vermin. Such infestations occur because of carelessness such as unhealthy behavior or uncleanness.

We don't know the background of this man but we do know that many demons had invaded his mind and body. We don't know the circumstances but he likely opened himself somehow to the possession. We know from God's Word that there are only two spiritual forces in the universe. There is God who has revealed to us who he is and how he operates. He has revealed these things in his Word. The other force is the devil and his demon forces. They will stop at nothing to deceive human beings. They will lie and cheat and, when necessary, try to dominate people to separate them from God. This is why we are warned to not give any opportunity for demons to take advantage of us. Remember when you learned the explanation to the Second Commandment that said we are not to “practice superstition” or “use witchcraft.” We probably thought it only meant silly practices like horoscopes or a Ouija board. But where does the power for such things come from? Even if you are only asking the board if the boy across the room in middle school likes you, what or who is providing the answer? To seek power or trust in something for answers from a source other than God is to dabble with demons. This is spiritually unclean and unhealthy. It invites the infestation of demonic vermin.

Demons use weaknesses to make victims afraid and to control their lives. This man was suffering. From the description of his actions, he may have suffered from a mental illness that was separate and different from the possession itself. We see his extraordinary behavior – not wearing clothes, living in tombs, fits of rage. But he also possessed uncanny strength to break chains. The demons used the domination of his mind to drive him from others into isolation. They filled him with fear and he was not able to control his own body. Imagine the fear the man faced! Imagine his frustration. He was isolated from other people and must have felt isolated from God as well. He was filled with hopelessness. He had demons.

## **2. I Have Demons**

You might ask: Does demon possession still happen today? The horror movies use the idea of possession to frighten us. Could it be that even these are demons at work? Could they be trying to overinflate their reputation of terror?

Some years ago I read an article about how the Roman Catholic Church was seeking people to serve as exorcists. It was explained that the main task of an exorcist is to determine whether the person is actually possessed or only suffering from a mental illness. The two things often go hand in hand. Other pastors have shared stories of people who may have been troubled by demons. Foreign missionaries among cultures that are more conscious of the spiritual realm report incidents. My son talks of such cases among the Apache. Personally I worked with a woman who thought she might be possessed. We determined that her problem was mostly due to an untreated mental illness because after she received medication, her situation was greatly improved. But I believe that demons use weaknesses such as mental illness to torment and frighten people. Demons would exploit any weakness to frighten and leave us thinking there is no hope.

What are “demons?” They are real spiritual beings. They are the angels that rebelled against God together with Satan. They want to drive us away from God.

We might use the expression, “He has his demons” to describe someone. It might be an addiction. It might be an explosive temper. It could be fear and anxiety. It could be depression. It can be any number of trapping habitual sins. They are not demon possession themselves but they are often used by demons to harm people spiritually. Demons still exploit our weaknesses to make us afraid and to doubt God. Luther

includes a petition in both his morning and evening prayers: “Let your holy angel be with me, that the WICKED FOE may have not power over me.” In his explanation to the 6<sup>th</sup> Petition of the Lord’s Prayer he says: “We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the DEVIL, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, DESPAIR, and other great and shameful sins.” These are real threats that require the power of prayer. Demons might use mental illness, sins, weaknesses and superstitions to deceive us.

Here a word about those things that “creep us out” is in order. There are the things that go bump in the night. The word is “poltergeist” – a German word that means “knocking spirit.” Here we can include all those phenomena like ghosts, odd lights, things that seem to move on their own and anything else that gives you “the willies.” Remember there are only two supernatural forces: God and demons. If such things aren’t the result of overactive imaginations, they are what we might call “little demons” who would make us afraid. Don’t let them.

In our rational and scientific culture we like to think that everything can be logically explained. We tend to downplay the seriousness of the spiritual battle that is certainly going on all the time all around us. We think of spiritual forces as fun and games – the stuff of horror movies. We like a good scare. But demons are truly at work.

Demons are at work to tear us away from God through fear and deception. They will use any weakness, any crack to gain entry to our minds. In our culture, it’s not so much evil spirits like the man Jesus cured, but materialism and selfishness and entitlement. These turn us away from God and from the message of Jesus as our Savior. These kinds of things consume and control our lives as surely as the legion of demons dominated the man in our account. They cause us to fall into anxiety, fear and despair. These things are also weaknesses to be exploited by the demons who would lie to us, control us and destroy us. But they don’t need to fill us with terror like in the horror movies. They aren’t as invulnerable as they like to make us believe.

### 3. Jesus Commands Demons

The demons know who the true power really is. When Jesus steps ashore they drive the man to come running. They incessantly beg Jesus not to harm them. See how pathetic they are! They beg Jesus not to give them what they deserve. They acknowledge him as the Most High God without willingly submitting to him. They have to have Jesus’ permission to do anything. They beg Jesus to let them go into the herd of pigs instead of sending them immediately to the Abyss of hell. This shows us their weakness and vulnerability. Did you catch it? Jesus gave them permission! He’s the one who is in charge.

They enter pigs. See the irony. In the Old Testament, God told the people of Israel not to use pigs. It wasn’t because God has something against pork chops. Pigs were the animal of choice for sacrifice to the pagan gods of Israel’s unbelieving neighbors. In talking about Israel’s idolatry, Paul says: *The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.* [1 Corinthians 10:20]

Also notice this. Pigs are smart animals. They were smart enough to destroy themselves by drowning in the lake rather than be dominated by demons. Despite their pleas, they still ended up in the Abyss. Notice the irony and even the tragic humor of the situation.

Jesus has power over all demons. He has power over them because he is their Creator. They are part of God’s creation. They are angels who rebelled with Satan and are condemned by God. Jesus has complete authority over them. They are not all-powerful. They do not know all things. But they do know our minds

and how they work. They know how to manipulate us. But they are “on a leash.” Jesus holds the other end of that leash as the Most High God and Creator.

Jesus also is the Savior of the human race. Jesus freed the man from this legion of demons. The man was released and filled with calm and peace. The power that it took to accomplish this filled his neighbors with fear. Here was one who was more powerful than the demons that terrified them.

Jesus frees us all. We open the door to the lies of demons by our superstitiousness. We open the door to sin. But Jesus closes it by his grace. We would despair because of our guilt and sin but Jesus’ forgiveness and righteousness cheers us. Demons might try to make us think God has deserted us but Jesus welcomes us to sit in peace at his feet.

So take demons seriously but don’t be afraid of them. We know to beware. It is said that if you know that a trap exists, it goes far in avoiding the trap. We know the tricks the demons would use but Jesus overcomes them. He wipes away sin. He takes the wind out of their accusations. His truth defeats their lies. His love brings us from isolation into God’s family. We have the certain promises of God’s Word. We have the sword of the Spirit that is God’s Word to defeat the devil’s schemes. **[Ephesians 6]** We can even laugh at the empty threats of Satan and his demon minions. Thomas More (English cleric) said: *“The devil ... that proud spirit ... cannot endure to be mocked.”* Luther said, *“The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.”* The devil has no sense of humor. Jesus is the conqueror who has defeated the legion of demons.

#### **4. Tell What Jesus Has Done for You**

Jesus gave the man with demons his freedom. He freed him from the demons. He freed him from his fear and isolation. He freed him from his sin. The man was so grateful that he was eager to do whatever Jesus asked. He kept on asking to follow Jesus. He begged to go with Jesus no matter where he wanted him to go or whatever Jesus wanted him to do. But Jesus had something else in mind for the man. He told him to go back to those neighbors who had chased him away. He was to go and tell them how much God had done for him. He would tell them about how Jesus freed him. What a powerful message!

Our witness can take the same form. When we are told to bring the gospel to others, we usually think that it means to tell them how Jesus brings forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life in heaven. These things are the most important things for us to tell to others. But this may not always be the best place to start. Sometimes it might be better to follow the example of this man and talk about how Jesus has freed us from our demons. We all have them. We can talk about the demons that cause fear and despair, loss of control in our lives, domination of sin. Everyone fights demons. We can tell them about how Jesus gives us victory. Jesus has made us free and we can share this good news. We can tell others things like: “I’m not afraid of dying.” We have courage in the face of serious illness, loss, desertion, disaster. We have peace in times of trouble. We have hope when it seems like there is no hope. When people hear what Jesus has done for us, we can give them the whole story about forgiveness and eternal life. Demons hold no threat for the one who know their conqueror!

The Roman legions were considered the unconquerable force of their day. They would melt away before the power of Christ. The same is true of the legions of demons. Satan’s troops might try to intimidate us. But have no fear. Jesus is the conqueror of all. The passage on which our hymn is based pictures Christ’s conquering might through the eyes of Isaiah: *Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? “It is I, proclaiming victory, mighty to save.”* **[Isaiah 63:1]** Christ conquers the legion of demons. Amen.