

Luke 8:26-39 – Jesus and the man in the tombs

“What do you want with me, Jesus?” cries the man possessed by demons. It’s a powerful question, and a surprising one. On the surface, no two people could seem more different. Jesus: a wandering teacher, a miracle-worker, someone people sought out and followed. Fully human, yet fully divine, filled with purpose, holiness, and compassion. And then there’s the demoniac: cast out from society, living among the dead in the tombs, feared by everyone, utterly alone. His life was the very opposite of holiness, his life was consumed by darkness.

So, what could Jesus possibly have to do with him? - Not much, at least at first glance. They come from completely different worlds. Yet, Jesus does more than just notice him, he stops, speaks, heals. He gives the man back his life. And here’s the striking part: the man never even asks for help. In fact, he begs Jesus to leave him alone. He isn’t seeking salvation; he’s trying to escape it. That plea, “leave us alone,” comes up again later, when the local people, witnesses to the astonishing power Jesus displays, also ask him to go. They recognise something true and fearsome in his presence. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

But we know that Jesus didn’t only reach out to those who were like him, or those who liked him, or those who understood him. If he had, he wouldn’t be the Messiah. His ministry was always about crossing social, spiritual and cultural boundaries. On this particular day, it brings him to one of the most hard done to souls in scripture: a man whose demons are so many they call themselves Legion. A Roman legion was made up of about 5,000 soldiers—so you get a sense of just how tormented this man was.

It’s a familiar story, and a dramatic one. But what’s perhaps even more remarkable than the exorcism itself is what happens next. Once healed, the man begs to stay with Jesus—who wouldn’t, after such deliverance? But Jesus doesn’t let him. Instead, he sends him home, telling him to share his story, to tell everyone what God has done for him. And the man does exactly that. This moment is pivotal. It’s the first time in Luke’s Gospel that Jesus steps into Gentile territory, a sign that his mission isn’t just for the people of Israel, but for the whole world. It’s a message that would have resonated deeply with Luke’s readers, both Jewish and Gentile: that no one is beyond the reach of grace. The insiders and the outsiders alike are being invited in.

This message still speaks today - we know all too well what it means to divide the world into “us” and “them.” Our society is often deeply tribal, whether in politics, race, class, or culture. Just look at recent leadership contests, where each faction draws clear lines around who belongs and who doesn’t. Or the persistent divides between native and newcomer, rich and poor, worker and executive.

Some say this instinct for group identity is ancient, perhaps even hardwired into the fabric of our very being. At times, it helps us make sense of the world. But it can also be destructive. The 20th century offers no shortage of reminders of what happens when tribalism turns toxic. That’s why this gospel reading matters so much. It’s a call to break through those barriers. When Jesus tells the healed man to return home and proclaim what God has done, he’s commissioning him as a bridge between worlds; a Jew sending a Gentile to speak to other Gentiles. It’s a mission of reconciliation. And it’s not just his mission - it’s ours too.

The freedom Jesus gives isn't something to hoard. The Good News isn't a private treasure. It's meant to be shared, to be lived out. We live in a nation where inequality grows wider, where decisions affecting everyday lives are made far away, where fear of "the other" still has a grip. These are the modern-day demons—this is our Legion. And Christ calls us to stand against them. The theologian William Temple once said that the Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of its non-members. If we're serious about being Christ's body in the world, we must be outward facing. I'm not saying this church isn't already doing that, but like any good truth, it bears repeating. Jesus' words to the healed man are his words to us: Yes, being close to Christ is a joy and a gift., but we are also sent. Like Mary in the garden, we are not to cling to Jesus, but to go and tell others about him. To tell others what God has done.

"Go home and tell how much God has done for you."

And the man went, telling everyone just how much Jesus had done for him.

Amen.