

People Over Pigs

Luke 8:26-39

Read Luke 8:26-39 together:

Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time 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 desert.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and 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. And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

Identity

We have just celebrated Christmas; we considered the great gift of Salvation that God provided to us through the Incarnation (Jesus taking on human flesh). Most of us tend to turn our thoughts in these first couple of weeks following Christmas to the new year. We celebrate a "new start"; we make resolutions to be a better, stronger, fitter person through renewed dedication!

But this year seems different...less celebratory. Given all we have faced in 2020! The constant craziness tends to desensitize us to the extraordinary. We can get caught up in the **mess** of hopelessness and miss the **Messenger** of hope! In Luke 8 we see some things about Jesus' arrival and mission that point us to His unwavering work and love, despite any circumstance that we face!

Let's set the stage a bit for this passage...

Jesus and His disciples had just sailed across the Sea of Galilee. But it wasn't your "normal" crossing! Jesus had calmed the great storm that threatened them all and the disciples were both amazed and afraid. "Who is this man who can command the winds and waters?"

They land on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee in Gentile territory. There is a herd of pigs nearby...certainly a clue that they are in Gentile country! This region was known for worshiping foreign gods and idolatry. This is certainly not how a devout Jew would identify Himself. This passage is a clear demonstration of the power of God at work. Jesus reaches out to a man who was otherwise totally lost!

This passage talks about **IDENTITY**. There are 3 clear markers of identity that Christ shows of Himself. It also helps us to reflect upon our own concept of personal identity.

Whether we think much about it or not, we all understand ourselves in a certain way. It is how we perceive ourselves within the context of our world. Many people identify with their vocation, "I am a nurse!" Others may identify with their talent or hobby/passion, "I am a singer!"

? What is your identity? When you meet someone new, how is it that you typically introduce yourself?

Let's look at the 3 markers of Christ's identity.

Christ's Availability

Jesus arrives in the country of Gerasenes and according to our passage, He is immediately confronted by a wild man with no clothes who has been living in a graveyard.

? Why would this situation be so disturbing for a devout Jew? (Yes, it sounds disturbing enough for us!)

? What are the religious ramifications or problems presented by this man approaching Jesus?

? How does Jesus respond to this man?

The availability of Jesus' love doesn't care for the unavailability of our schedules and anxiety.

? How do you look at ministry? Is it on a schedule?

? How flexible are you when it comes to ministry?

? Do you wait when you shouldn't? Have you ever thought, "If I could just get my neighbor to go to church, I bet he could get saved!"?

Jesus was confronted by a man who wasn't a part of the agenda, yet He didn't walk away. He stopped and He poured out His love where the need was. We have been and still are, in a season of unplanned interruptions. We worry over the inconveniences of masks and social distancing. But Jesus is unperturbed by the circumstances with which He is faced!

? What does Jesus do in this crazy situation?

Christ's Ability

? What had the people of the town attempted in trying to control this man?

? How did all of their attempts work out for them?

Apart from the ability of God, men and women are only able to manage the problems of this world.

- ? What are some of the opinions, theories, and movements that the world is trusting to solve their problems right now?
- ? How should Christians respond to the problems of the world?

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.
Acts 4:12

- ? In Who and what should we root our identity? How will that look to the unsaved world?

Christ's Authority

As Jesus prepares to leave, the man begs to go along with Jesus and His disciples.

- ? Why, do you think, the man wanted to go with Jesus? Was it purely out of gratitude for his healing?
- ? What is Jesus' response to the request?
- ? Why do you think Jesus responds as He does?

Isn't it true that sometimes the hardest place to do ministry is where people have seen you at your worst?

When we obey the authority of God, we reflect God's light as a contrast to our past darkness, not in absence of it.

- ? Can you think of another Jesus encounter where the recipient of Jesus' healing and grace stayed where everyone had seen her/him at her/his worst?

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
1 Peter 2:9

We live in a time of record numbers of depression cases, record numbers of anxiety cases, and an overwhelming sense of failure. The contrast of the cross is so important! We need to have our identity deeply rooted in the cross where the love of God was displayed to the world. Let's identify with the **Messenger** and not the **mess**!