



Luke 8:26–33

26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. 27 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. 28 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!' 29 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. 30 Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'

'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him. 31 And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. 32 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. 33 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.

Reflection

Last week ended with Jesus' disciples sitting shell-shocked in a boat bobbing up and down gently on the eerily calm sea of Galilee. Only moments before, many of them lifetime fishermen, were fearful for their lives due to a violent storm; the raging wind and waves threatening to swamp their boat. Then Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves and all was calm. Jesus had calmed the storm with a word. Sitting in that boat it's like they've never truly seen Jesus before. Their mortal fear of the storm

in an instant transferred to the man before them. They're overcome by amazement and fear at this near-death experience. But even more disturbing is having witnessed the wind and waves obeying the commands of a man. Fishermen have a saying that 'time and tide waits for no man' – until now. Their whole reality shaken to the core we left the disciples last week asking one another, 'Who is this?' Who then is this man? 'He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.' Who is this seated so calmly before us?

And their question is the question Luke would have us answer in Luke 8. In it we see Jesus as Lord over creation, calming the sea at a word, Lord over demons, Lord over sickness and Lord over death. In other words, Jesus is Lord over all. And so we

move from Lord over creation in Friday's text, to Lord over demons today. And as the shell-shocked disciples' boat touches the shore, this is what they're confronted with, reading from today's passage in Luke 8:26–33,

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drowned.

And so after their near-death experience on the water, in their fragile emotional state, as their storm-battered boat touches the shoreline the disciples are assaulted by a naked, screaming, demon-possessed man. In Mark's gospel we read that this man possessing superhuman strength and would regularly cut himself with stones and so we can only imagine the renewed wave of fear that would have come upon Jesus' disciples.

Jesus steps forward, again placing himself right in the middle of their fears. Their lesson is not over for today. They've just learnt on the Sea of Galilee that Jesus is Lord over all of creation, which includes the spiritual realm. And now on the shore

of the Sea of Galilee they are going to witness firsthand that Jesus is Lord over demons.

And yet the problem for us in the Western world is that we don't believe in demons. To borrow a line from pop culture, 'The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist', and by-and-large, the Western world has bought this lie. Most modern psychologists, for example, dismiss the idea of demon possession as something that does not fit within the parameters of their science. And yet, apparent possession by spirits is a world-wide phenomenon. It is sought out deliberately by the shaman and witch-doctor amongst more primitive cultures and by mediums among both primitive and more civilized men and women. It

may come upon individuals suddenly, as with watchers of the Voodoo rites, or in the form of what is generally known as demon possession. In each case the possessed person behaves in a way that is not normal for him or her, speaks in a voice totally different from normal, and often shows powers of telepathy and clairvoyance.

In the Bible pagan prophets like the prophets of Baal very likely sought possession. Mediums, who were banned in Israel, must have deliberately cultivated possession, since the law regards them as guilty people. In the Old Testament Saul is an example of unsought possession, the Spirit of the Lord leaves him and 'an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.' (1 Sam 16:14; 19:9) And in the Gospels we see a high concentration of demonic activity. For Je-

sus and the Gospel writers the Devil, or Satan, is the chief enemy of Jesus and the establishing of the kingdom of God. In his ministry, especially in his exorcisms, Jesus engages in the first stage of the defeat of Satan in casting out his evil minions. The Gospels depict demons causing convulsions, loud screaming, a change of voice or character, chaotic and unpredictable behaviour, superhuman strength and indifference to pain. Typically, a disturbance is caused by the sufferer when confronted by Jesus. Also, the demon-possessed were considered to have special insight into the identity of Jesus.

And much of this we see in today's passage. The man confronting Jesus and his disciples lives among the tombs. He terrorizes the land, possessed with a super-

human strength enough to break chains whenever he has been captured. Night and day he howls, tormented by demons, gashing himself with rocks in an attempt to drive out that which lives inside him. We imagine this poor, wild, naked, unstable man, his flesh a patchwork of bleeding lacerations and scars. Dehumanized, animalized, marginalized, frightening and fearful. In his lucid moments he surely realises how repulsive he is and yet he is powerless to do anything about it, host as he is to a 'legion' of demons. I'm not sure there is a more miserable person presented to us in all of Scripture.

The man falls down at Jesus' feet and then screams at the top of his lungs in an otherworldly voice that would have made the hair on the back of your neck stand

on end,

‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!’

Because Jesus is Lord over all creation, including demons. And even demons know in their heart of hearts that there is only one true God. They believe, and shudder (Jas 2:19). Listen again to the eyewitness testimony of even the supernatural minions of evil when it comes to Jesus,

‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God

Think & Pray

And we’ll pick up what happens next in

tomorrow's passage. But for today I'd like to you mediate on what we've discussed so far and also to consider this quote by C S Lewis,

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils (by which he means demons). One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist and magician with the same delight.

Pray this morning about both of these errors and ask God for wisdom when it comes to understanding his teaching in the Bible about the spiritual realm. And thank God

that Jesus, the Son of the Most High God, came to bring an end to Satan, sin and death forever. And that in him we no longer have anything to fear when it comes to the demonic.