

Sermons at  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

June 19, 2022 (Proper 7, Year C)  
Luke 8:26-39

The beginning of our story sounds a little like a scene from a horror-movie. It's an eerie, grim, suspenseful, frightening situation. Jesus and His disciples have just come through a storm on the Sea of Galilee. It's nighttime, and having SURVIVED that FRIGHTENING storm, they're THRILLED to set foot on solid ground again. But little do they know what's coming. Just as they get out of the boat, they encounter a DIFFERENT kind of storm. They hear strange SOUNDS coming from the tombs... shrieks, growls, screams, moans, rattling of chains. Then, suddenly, a HORRIFYING sight. Through the evening mist, a wild-eyed madman comes rushing and shrieking out of the tomb. He's naked. He's covered in filth, and blood, and WORSE. He's bruised and battered, with chains dangling from his arms and ankles. He's possessed. He's powerful, dangerous, berserk, and screaming, and he's COMING DIRECTLY TOWARD them!

Now, let me ask: "What would YOU have done in that situation?"  
Do you remember this commercial?

*(show video "Horror Movie Bad Choices It's What You Do - GEICO Commercial")*

I love that. "When you're in a horror movie, you make BAD choices – it's what you do." "Head for the cemetery!" they yell at the end.

This scene seems to fit, SEEMS like a bad decision. But not just because it's frightening; it's a bad decision for RELIGIOUS reasons too. This wasn't the kind of PLACE a GOOD JEWISH boy should GO. They were to AVOID UNCLEAN THINGS. But THIS is GENTILE territory – "unclean"; they go to the cemetery – "unclean"; there are demons – "unclean spirits"; there are pigs – "unclean." The horror!

This possessed man was nothing like "normal" people. He ran around naked. He was "out of his ever-loving mind." He was strong enough to BREAK any chains and shackles they tried to restrain him with. He could ESCAPE from any prison that his neighbors built to CONTAIN him. He lived in the graveyard. He spent his life ranting and raving among the tombs, living with the DEAD.

They SHOULD have run for their LIVES... or at least jumped back in the BOAT.

But not Jesus! Like a HERO, Jesus stood His ground and FACED the madman. Unafraid, Jesus CONFRONTED this demon and DEALT with him.

And did you notice how EASILY he DID it? Again and again, the gospels show us that Christ has authority over all things, EVEN the DEMONIC. He said, "Come out of him, you unclean spirit!" (Mark 5:8) And it's done, (snap) just like that.

The demons saw it COMING too. They RECOGNIZED Jesus. They KNEW who he was. And in the Gospels, demons are scared stiff of the POWER of Jesus Christ. They try to get away from Him as fast as they can! They cried out, "What have you to do with ME, Jesus, Son of the most high God?"

The ANSWER is that Jesus had EVERYTHING to do with this man. Jesus had come to that place, ESPECIALLY and PARTICULARLY, for HIM. Jesus doesn't do ANYTHING ELSE there. After he heals this man, Jesus leaves and goes BACK.

You see, even ACROSS the SEA, Jesus KNEW how TROUBLED THIS man was, how DEEPLY he needed help. So Jesus CROSSED the sea, just to get to HIM, and ONLY him. He crossed into Gentile territory, foreign territory, JUST for HIM. And while CROSSING the sea, a storm rose up to STOP him, but NOTHING will stop Jesus from GETTING to this man. He simply said to the

storm, "Peace, be still." And it WAS. And he sailed on, to reach this ONE man, to CURE him and RESTORE him to his right mind.

People and societies have been asking that SAME QUESTION ever since: "What have you to do with us, Jesus?"

And the ANSWER is STILL the SAME. Jesus has EVERYTHING to do with us.

In our world today, evil is a HORRIBLE reality. We usually don't talk about demonic possession or unclean spirits, but we DO KNOW EVIL.

The world is FULL of demons as toxic and traumatic as those that came raging out of this poor man. We have SEEN EVIL. We've WITNESSED evil in staggering ways. We've seen war. We've seen monsters commit genocide. We've seen terror. We've seen greed. We've seen children disappear. We've seen whole classrooms of the little ones that Jesus loves so dearly so disfigured that even their parents don't recognize them. We've seen church Bible studies and potlucks mowed down in a hail of gunfire. Again and again we've seen MADMEN TAKING INNOCENT LIFE after life after life.

These nightmares keep us AWAKE at night. But the message of this story is that, in Jesus, there IS HOPE, because Jesus is ALWAYS STRONGER THAN EVIL.

We STILL ask, "What have you to do with US, Jesus? Leave us alone. Mind your own business. Keep your hands OFF MY life." Because it's not just out THERE. We have our OWN demons. INCREDIBLE numbers of people are possessed by addiction. Some of us battle EVERY day with the demon of depression, or fear or anxiety. Some of us carry a memory so PAINFUL that it PARALYZES us. Some have so MANY battles within us, against so MANY DEMONS, that their name is "Legion."

But the ANSWER is the STILL the same. Jesus has EVERYTHING to do with us. In Jesus, there IS HOPE, because Jesus is ALWAYS STRONGER.

Look again at this poor man in our story. All that was LEFT of him was a boiling cauldron of conflicting forces. It was as if a Roman legion, 6000 VOICES, were at WAR INSIDE him.

I think it's no coincidence that, in the English language, the word evil is "live" spelled BACKWARDS. Evil doesn't just keep us UP at night; it keeps us from LIVING. Evil ALWAYS destroys.

By the way, that's what it meant when the pigs drowned themselves. Evil is ALWAYS DESTRUCTIVE, and given its way, it's ultimately SELF-destructive—it will even destroy ITSELF. And it will try to take YOU WITH it.

But the MESSAGE of this story is that JESUS WON'T LET it destroy you, because JESUS is STRONGER. He's stronger than any storm, stronger than any demon, stronger than 6000 demons. Stronger the SATAN HIMSELF.

Jesus CAME to this man, CROSSED the sea and BATTLED a storm to GET to him, to GIVE him his LIFE BACK. Jesus HEALED him, gave him PEACE, CLEANSED him, TURNED his life AROUND. Jesus SAVED him—in EVERY way.

And he'll do that for YOU TOO. He hears your cries, and he'll go to the ends of the EARTH to REACH you. He'll BATTLE ANY storm, go to ANY LENGTH, DEFEAT any DEMON. He died for you. And he'd rather go to HELL FOR you, than to HEAVEN WITHOUT you.

Whatever DEMON you're BATTLING right now, whatever MONSTER it is that's FRIGHTENING you, whatever NIGHTMARE is keeping you UP at night, whatever is making you DOUBT yourself, WHATEVER is KEEPING you from REALLY LIVING, it just met its MATCH. Jesus came to SAVE you, and Jesus is STRONGER than ANYTHING that would hold you down.

Give it to Jesus. When you're a CHRISTIAN, "it's what you do." And he can do BETTER than save you 15%. He can save YOU.

Jesus is LORD, and that has EVERYTHING to do with YOU. Amen.