

**Luke 8:26-39**

I wonder if that man who was possessed by demons was a father. Our text does not tell us if he had a family, but very possibly he did. Father's Day (if there had been a Father's Day back then) would have been extremely difficult for his children. Their dad was a raving lunatic, running around without any clothes, living out in the graveyard, controlled by demons who made his body their home. Would you acknowledge him as your dad? Would you acknowledge him as your son, your husband, your brother? He was rejected by the townspeople, wasn't he? They were afraid of him. On different occasions they chained him with shackles, but the demons gave him superhuman strength; he could not be bound for very long.

But even this poor, wretched, miserable man had a Heavenly Father who loved him. Jesus crossed over the Sea of Galilee to come to that country, and the only thing He did there was to help this poor man. Now his children would not need to live in fear of their dad anymore. Now he could return home to be with his family. Now he could, and did, proclaim what Jesus had done for him.

In more ways than we might think you and I resemble that man. And not the least of which is that you have a Heavenly Father who loves you just as He loved that man. You may not be possessed by demons at the present time, but at one time you belonged to Satan. We are all born as his possession. As the Father in heaven had mercy on that poor man from Gerasene, sending Jesus to rescue him from the power of the devil, so your dear Father had mercy on you. In your baptism Jesus freed you from Satan's kingdom. He removed his chains and shackles from you by cleansing you of your sin and giving you birth into the family of God.

We do not know that man's name. We'll have to wait until we get to heaven to find out. When Jesus asked him, the man replied, "(My name is) Legion," for many demons had entered him. How many demons make up a legion? Well, a legion of Roman soldiers numbered 6,000. 6,000 demons living within one man. No wonder he was a mess. No wonder the people were so afraid of him. No wonder he lived out among the tombs. The devils and death belong together. Darkness, death, misery, fear and terror...all these things are what Satan is all about.

In the early 70's when *The Exorcist* came out in theaters, movie-goers were frightened out of their wits by the story of a young girl who was possessed by a demon. It was not "make-believe." The story was based on fact. Only it was not a girl, but a boy who was possessed, and it took place here in the St. Louis area. One of our professors at Concordia (Lutheran) Seminary, a student at the time, remembers the day when that boy was brought on to the campus. He saw the young man's face and it sent a chill down his spine to see the demonic look in his eyes. To this day he remembers the face of that boy.

Now multiply that demonic face by 6,000. That's what Jesus encountered when He got out of the boat. "Leave me alone, Jesus Son of the most high God!" the man came screaming at Him. I think I'd get back in the boat and paddle away as fast as I could. But Jesus showed no fear at all. He spoke to the man with authority. At His word the devils must obey. Why were they so upset at Jesus--this legion of demons? They did not want Him to command them to return to the abyss, to their hellish prison. The one thing--the only thing--that the demons want to do is to create mischief here on earth. They want to make life miserable for God's people, miserable for you.

I'm not saying that all our misery, all our troubles are caused by demons. We bring much trouble upon ourselves by our sinful living. But do not think that the demons only live on the other side of

this world. Where are those 6,000 demons now? They're not in those pigs anymore; they drowned in the sea. And where are all the other legions--thousands and millions of demons? They are found where God's people are found. They do not want to waste their time on those people who are already in their camp. They tear at the faith of Christians. First and foremost, they plague those who are the "baptized," those who belong to Jesus.

A wise man once said, "When God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel next to it." He doesn't want true Christian churches to thrive. He doesn't want the saving Gospel of Jesus to be proclaimed without interference. He doesn't want church members to get along...with themselves or with their pastor. He doesn't want them to be faithful on Sunday morning. He doesn't want them to study God's Word with eager hearts. The demons do not want you to sleep well at night; they desire to burden you with a heavy conscience. They do not want you to have a happy marriage. They do not want children to honor father and mother. And most of all, they do not want you to cling to Christ. They do not want His words to come into your ears or His Sacrament to enter your mouth.

This story, however, teaches us that when Jesus is present, demons do not always get what they want. Jesus wanted that man. So did the demons. 6,000 against one. But 6,000 devils are no match against one Savior. With a word Jesus drove those demons out of that poor man. And that man rejoiced not just to have his life back, but to have life eternal in heaven with his loving Lord.

Friend, Jesus wants you. Your life may be a mess, like that man from Gerasene. Your life may be a series of one problem after another. Your life may be, and in fact it is as is mine, a sinful, rebellious life. "Why," you may think, "would Jesus want me?" That man from Gerasene had every reason to ask the same question. But his question was answered fully with the love and power of Christ.

And so with you. Jesus claimed you in your baptism. You are His. And so even though you and I daily walk away from Him; even though the devils tear at you and claw at your faith; even though they fill you with doubts, and confusion, and fears, Jesus wants you. If you have been wandering away from Him, He is here in His words of forgiveness to reclaim you as His own. With His word of pardon He tells Satan to "Begone!" You are God's forgiven child; Jesus says so. With His body and blood given you here, He puts Himself within you so that no matter how many demons are against you, He, Jesus, is for you...and one Savior is all you need against all the devils in the world.

There was a man some years ago who was plagued by doubts and fears. It seems that the demons were having their way with him. But he was brought to Jesus. He was baptized into Christ. He lived as a faithful member of the church. He became very sick and was about to die. A few days before he died, his pastor went to see him at the hospital. As he entered the room he noticed an empty chair by the man's bed. The pastor asked him if someone had been by to visit. The old man smiled, "That chair is Jesus' chair." The pastor was puzzled so the man explained. "You taught me that no matter how many and how powerful the devils are around us, that Jesus is always with me; that I can always ask Him for help; that He will never leave me. So every day I pull up that chair to remind me that Jesus is here with me." A few days later the daughter of that man came to the church office to inform the pastor that her father had just died. "Because he seemed so content," she said, "I left him alone in his room for a few hours. When I got back to his room, I found him dead. I noticed a strange thing, though. His head was resting, not on his pillow, but on an empty chair that was beside his bed."

That chair wasn't empty, was it? And this church is not empty. These are not empty words. The bread and wine are not empty symbols. Jesus is here with you and for you. Let the demons scream

all they want. They cannot have you. You belong to Christ. He loves you. He forgives you. Cling to Him always! He is your one and only Savior. Amen.