

Maybe you were not very enchanted by the cover of our bulletin today. This hideous man may even have been the first thing to greet you when you entered the church this morning. But consider that when Jesus stepped out of the boat onto the land, this man was right there to greet Him. And not just a picture of his face, but all of him, in his birthday suit, with his ghastly cries and shrieks. His disciples may have been wondering, “We came all the way across the sea for this?” And actually, they did. For after healing the man of his demon possession, Jesus obliged the townspeople and got back in the boat and left.

Was His journey across the water worth it? It was for this man. A legion of demons within him had turned this man into a monstrosity. For a long time, it says, he had been tormented by the demons, (four to six thousand of them by the way). He lived as a naked, raving madman. The demons forcing him to dwell among the tombs of the dead. St. Mark adds that he was “*always crying out and cutting himself with stones.*”

I think the Lutheran artist, Ed Riojas, superbly depicted this man on our bulletin cover. And I found it interesting that when I moved my computer’s cursor over his image on the screen, it called it a picture of a horse. But what horse would want to look like that man? I don’t suppose that he had a family of a wife and children. But if he did, do you think his children celebrated Father’s Day? They would surely have been embarrassed of their dad.

So, Jesus and His disciples cross the water for this possessed man, and yet he had not called to Jesus for help. Just the opposite, in fact. “*What have you to do with me, Jesus!*” he said to Him. In other words, “*Why don’t you leave me alone!*” Now to be fair, the demons were speaking using the man’s mouth. They had such a tight grip on this man that he was unable to even squeak out the words, “Help me.”

The demons, speaking with one voice, begged Jesus, “*Do not torment me!*” Now isn’t this something? The demons consider it torment and pure agony for them when they are not allowed to torment us. The only thing the demons want to do is to torment to the utmost the children of mankind.

They actually pray to Jesus here in our text. They petition Him, which is prayer, to leave them alone. But He says no to their prayer. And so, they pray to Jesus again. They petition Him to allow them to enter some pigs nearby. And this time Jesus says yes to their prayer. And so we see two thousand pigs all in a panic, possessed by this legion of demons, rushing toward the cliff, down the cliff, and into the sea where they all drown.

I imagine the pig herders were thinking, “Jesus, why don’t you leave us alone!” And when the people of the town came out to see everything that was going on, they spoke these words out loud to Jesus. They not only ask Him to leave them alone, but to leave and not come back. Can you imagine? Telling Jesus to leave? “We don’t want you around. Just go. Leave us alone!”

He did. But not completely. For after He healed the man of his demons, He told the man to stay there. He had been asking Jesus to go with Him. Jesus said yes to the prayer of the demons, but He says no to this man’s prayer. This man, now healed, and more than that – taught the Faith

sitting there like Mary at Jesus' feet, was to be Jesus' missionary in his own hometown. They did not want Jesus. Yet through this man, the good news of Jesus would be given to all the people because he went throughout the whole city, it says, proclaiming Jesus.

Now listen to this. You were not possessed by a legion of demons when you were born. But you did belong to the devil, and you came out naked like this man. And I imagine you were crying out like him. But what Jesus did for him He did for you. He crossed the water, the water of Holy Baptism, and it was only because of you. Jesus met you, as He met this man at the water's edge, and He drove the devil out of you. And more, He told, yes commanded your parents, to place you at His feet to be instructed in the Christian Faith.

Now after you were baptized, had you peered into the water of the font, you would not have seen two thousand pigs drowned there. Yet, as with the Israelites seeing the bodies of the Egyptian soldiers drowned in the Red Sea after they were baptized in that water, you can look in the water of your baptism and see your Old Adam and all your sins drowned, looking like a herd of dead pigs. Go ahead and do it. Look into the water of the font. By faith in Jesus' promise, you see the entire herd of your sins all drowned there because Jesus' death and resurrection for you put them there.

And so, you are forgiven. Forgiven of all your sins. They're drowned, dead, and buried with Christ in your baptism. You are forgiven. And thus, no demon has control of your tongue. So, why would you tell Jesus to leave you alone? And why would you leave Him alone? Was it worth it for Him to come across the water for you? To drive the devil out of you? To drown the entire herd of your sins?

Don't answer that with your mouth. Answer it with your life, your actions. If it was all worth it to you, then don't leave Jesus alone. Don't leave His Word and Sacrament alone. Don't leave His house of worship alone. But stay at His feet here where you belong.

His promise is to never leave you alone. And He always keeps His promises. Were you to ask Him, "Why is it, Jesus, that You do not leave me alone?" His answer is in your baptism. "Because you are Mine," He says to you, "and I love you." Amen.