

Sermon on Sunday 22 June 2025

by Rev. Scott Martin

Gospel: Luke 8 26-39

This morning, in our Gospel reading, we join Jesus and his disciples as they arrive at the country of the Gerasenes, a predominantly gentile region which is opposite Galilee. Jesus has just unnerved and amazed the disciples by calming the wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee. When he steps ashore in the country of the Gerasenes, he is immediately met by a man of the city who possessed with demons. We are told that for a long time this man had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house, but in the tombs. So, the man was in a bad state, and the description of him as living among the tombs, suggests that in the eyes of many, he was lost and as good as dead.

As modern 21st Century readers of this text, we can't help but wonder what is meant exactly, by "having demons". It was not uncommon in Jesus' day to understand demons as supernatural beings, forces of destruction that bring disorder and despair upon those unfortunate enough to be caught up within their grasp and control. Whatever your own beliefs are about the origins of such struggle and suffering, whether demonic or a more medical explanation, just as then, even today, we are not strangers to human suffering that manifests itself as being caught up in the grip of something beyond choice and control.

So, here we have a man at the mercy of something he has no ultimate control over. He is beside himself, torn from the social conventions and acceptable behaviour of his peers. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles that he would break and be driven by the demon into the wilds, as well as living among the tombs; he was only half alive. What is interesting about the first encounter between Jesus and the demoniac is that the man, upon seeing Jesus, didn't cry for help. In fact, we're told that he fell before Jesus and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me". Here we find a similar response to Jesus as the disciples had when Jesus calmed the storm; shock and fear! Why is this? Why the unsettled feeling of shock and fear? Why did the demons see Jesus as a potential tormentor?

When Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man, he asked him, "What is your name?" The man replied, "Legion" because many demons had entered him. By asking the man his name, Jesus does something very revealing. He turns the situation into a healing epiphany. The encounter with Christ, whether by the man possessed with demons or the frightened disciples in the boat, becomes an encounter with the Lord of all creation. And it is the immensity of that encounter that can only ever produce awe and fear of the type that leaves us speechless.

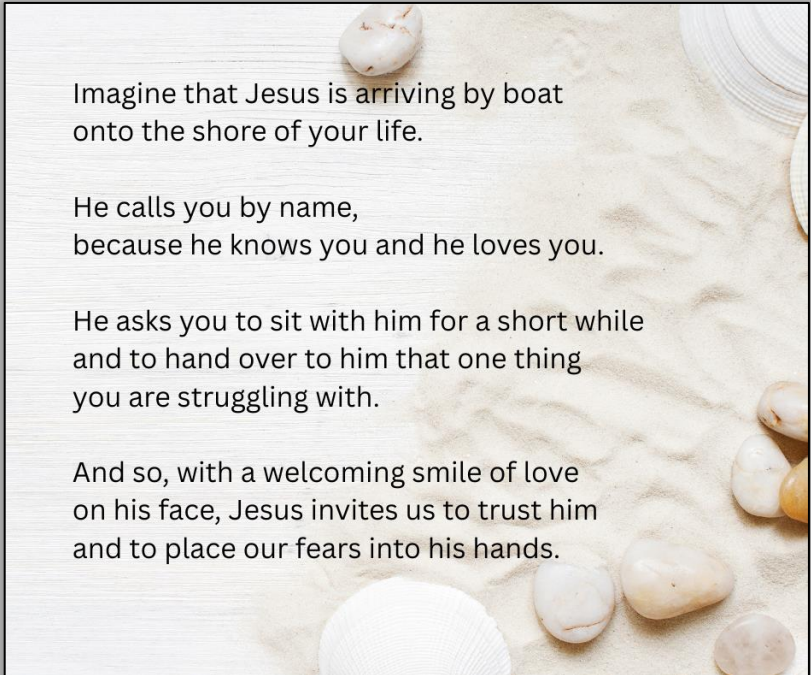
Our reflection on the Gospel this morning began with the consideration of a man struggling and being tormented by things beyond his control. And although many of us here today would hardly describe ourselves as possessed by a Legion of demons, we may well have, within our own lives, things we struggle with that often feel at times as though they are beyond our control. Dare I say... our own demons. These may take the form of memories that we still struggle with, a person we find difficult but cannot avoid, a character trait within ourselves that we wish we didn't have or an unrelenting anticipation of something beyond the horizon and in the future.

In some ways, we're not a million miles away or different from the frightened disciples in the boat on the sea of Galilee, or the man that wanted to be free of his demons but was fearful of the consequences of what that might mean? Just like them, we're fragile human beings, with our own weaknesses and fears of the unpredictable. But that's okay. In fact, in some ways, it's even necessary. It's necessary because, it helps us to understand that the pursuit of perfection and total control over everything in our lives, is the pursuit of a fantasy. It's a fantasy because, like the disciples in the boat and the demoniac that needed healing, to learn to see truthfully, to learn to be healed, we too need to encounter the Lord of all creation; in the recognition that we will always, ultimately, be dependent upon a reality greater than ourselves.

The Legion of demons saw Jesus as a potential tormentor because they viewed him as nothing more than a magnified version of themselves. In the end, they entered the swine and plunged into the lake and drowned rather than being exposed to the light of the Lord of Life.

The journey of Christian discipleship is a journey of continual healing. When Jesus healed the man possessed of demons and he was found to be sitting clothed and in his right mind at the feet of his Lord, the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; once again we are told that in the presence of Christ as Lord of creation, they were seized with fear! The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might stay with Jesus, but he was instructed to return to his home and declare how much God has done for him!

I'd like to finish this morning by inviting you to spend a few minutes with me in silence. I'd like you to imagine that Jesus is arriving by boat onto the shore of your lives. He calls you by name, because he knows you and he loves you. He asks



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And so, with a welcoming smile of love
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you to sit with him for a short while and to hand over to him that one thing you are struggling with; that area of your life that makes you feel somewhat unsettled and in the grip of something you would like to be healed of, released from. And so, with a welcoming smile of love on his face, Jesus invites us to trust him and to place our fears into his hands...

Let us pray.

Lord of healing, you have loved us into being and hold us all in the ever-outflowing grace of your life and truth. We are at times held in the grip and fear of things that seem to be beyond our control. Help us to lay them at your feet, to bring them into the light of your healing and liberating love. Help us to trust you, and to be set free from those things that prevent us from seeing clearly, that we may continue in our journey, responding to the Lord of all creation, as you continue to say to each one of us "Follow Me".

Amen.