

## From Madness to Stillness

Scriptures: 1 Kings 19:1-4, 8-15; Luke 8:26-39

### Living the Spirit Life

Since Pentecost we've been looking at a sermon series titled, "Living the Spirit Life." That's a good title, but it could be fine-tuned to be "Living the Spirit-filled Life." Two weeks ago we looked at, and talked about, the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost. That was, and is, a big deal – the Spirit of Christ coming to live in the hearts of believers – it's how Jesus' presence is revealed in the world today.

We recently had the West Ohio Annual Conference, and afterwards Janice and I talked about it. She talked with you last week about some of that, and shared a video from Pastor Shaw discussing being Spirit-filled, as opposed to spiritual. We have a lot of spiritual people running around here today. Along with Father's Day, it's also Juneteenth today.

On June 19, 1865, slaves in Galveston, Texas, first heard the news from Union troops coming into that city that President Abraham Lincoln – who by this time had been assassinated – issued the Emancipation Proclamation on New Year's Day, 1863, freeing them from slavery. Now friends, I'm no mathematician, but from what I can tell from those dates, it took a little more than two and a half years for some of these slaves – human beings – to find out that they had been freed. It's been a holiday for some ever since. There were a lot of spiritual people running around – men who fought and died serving in the Confederate army.

There were lots of spiritual people running around while Jesus was doing the teaching and healing He was doing before He went to the cross. Being spiritual, and being Spirit-filled, are two very different things. Today we're going to look at an instance of this found in Luke's gospel. In this instance, we find a man who's pretty spiritual, some might even say he's spirit-filled, but in the reading, we quickly find that it's the wrong way! I'm reading from the New International Version this morning. If you have your Bible, or a Bible app handy, turn with me to Luke 8:26-39. **Read Luke 8:26-39.**

### Where To Go For Help?

As I studied this earlier this week, one of the first things that hit me was the weird sounding name of the location where this occurred. "They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee," Luke 8:26 says. If you look closely at that word, "Gerasenes," there's a notation on it that says "some manuscripts Gadarenes; other manuscripts Gergesenes." What this means is that when you look back at the most ancient copies of Luke's gospel, as people copied them – they copied everything in those days by hand – somewhere, somebody changed a letter or the spelling of the word. So the place may have been any of the three names. The point is, it was an area located on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee.

We talked some about Galilee on Pentecost. Who mostly lives there? Gentiles or Samaritans – Jewish people who had intermingled with the Gentile Roman occupiers. If they're Jewish and living in the Galilee region, it's probably safe to say they feel like second-class citizens in comparison to the Romans stationed there. I'd imagine that's probably true of all the Jewish people living throughout the Holy Land during this time period.

Notice what happens as soon as they reach shore. "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," (verse 27). Have you ever noticed that when someone's oppressed – when people face oppression – they seek out someone they think can liberate them? For example, when Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine, where did the Ukrainian people look to for assistance? I think some of them looked to Europe and the US – probably not the best places to look to for help.

Who does the demon-possessed man seek help from? Jesus. Jesus should be our go-to Person in anything going on in our lives! We could say it's a certainty that this fellow is spiritual. We might even be able to say he's spirit-filled – but it's the wrong spirit! Someplace, deep down inside the man, there was a spark of God's image still unblemished that recognized who Jesus was, and that Jesus could help him – so he comes to Jesus.

### **Son of the Most High God**

"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!'" (verse 28). Apparently the guy wasn't even in control of his own speech. We know this is the demon speaking to Jesus, right? Jesus – God who loves us enough to die on the cross in place of us – He doesn't torture anyone. He wants to have a relationship with us, and all other people. That's what He came for, to set captives free and to restore right relationships between people and others, and most importantly, between people and Himself. "This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all," (1 John 1:5) the Apostle whom Jesus loved wrote. God doesn't torture people. It's not His nature.

I always find it interesting, too, that the demons – when face-to-face with Him – rightly recognize Jesus for who He is, "Son of the Most High God." We get a little background information next in our Scripture passage. "Jesus had commanded the evil 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," (Luke 8:29). Apparently, the demon-possessed man had incredible strength whenever the demon was in control. Almost like the Incredible Hulk – you've seen that guy before, right?

The Incredible Hulk started out as a comic book character in 1962, and has been in cartoons, and even movies. His alter-ego, Dr. Bruce Banner, is a mild-mannered scientist who's exposed to something resulting in the creation of the Incredible Hulk.

When he gets mad, he turns green, busts out of his clothes – he’s wearing rags at that point – and even his close friends don’t recognize him. Along the same lines, when people are really suffering, it seems like they hit the “pause” button on life, doesn’t it? I’ve known people over the years, who battle with depression, and when they hit those low points, they isolate themselves. It’s sad.

## **Legion**

The demon-possessed man’s situation was also sad. I think that’s probably why we have it in the Scriptures – besides showing Jesus as far above and beyond the power of any created being, including demons – we see the compassion of Christ on full display. “Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Legion,’ he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss,” (verses 30-31). Legion’s not actually a name, it was a Roman military term used to describe a group of about 6,000 soldiers.

So the demon – demons actually – who speak to Jesus are basically saying there are multiple demons, possibly thousands, present in the man. In modern-day terms, we might say the man suffered from a sort of multiple personality disorder. That’s a heart-breaking medical diagnosis, and often requires long-term care. See friends, even with all the medical advancements of the age we live in, our doctors aren’t able to cure this. But Jesus does!

Another thing that’s striking here, is that the demons plead with Jesus not to send them into the Abyss. Most commentaries indicate that the Abyss is a place of confinement and punishment for evil spirits and Satan. I don’t need to tell you where that is, Church, you already know. Over the years, there have been a few people who’ve told me to go there, and maybe someone’s said that to you, too, before. All joking aside, it’s apparent that it’s a dismal place, which even the demons don’t want to be in!

## **The Merciless Want Mercy**

See, the demons recognize who Jesus is – He’s God – and He has power over them. “A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and He gave them permission,” (verse 32), Luke records next. It’s ironic that the merciless – those who inflict suffering and pain on others – want mercy for themselves. We see many examples of that in history. During the Reconstruction era after the Civil War, many white Southern slaveholders had to go through a process of re-pledging allegiance to the United States, after they lost their voting rights when the Confederacy fell. Yet they thought nothing of treating other humans like cattle for decades before, and even after, in some cases.

The same could be said of the events in South Africa spanning the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The White minority government was led by prominent Boers – descendants of Dutch colonists from the 1600’s who rebelled against England in the 1890’s, then begged for mercy, and received it, from the United Kingdom. They implemented rigid racial laws, we know it as “apartheid,” and herded native Africans

into high poverty areas with little to no natural resources called “bantustans.” By the mid-1990’s the Black majority population in South Africa had decided enough was enough, and rather than face a civil war, the minority White government agreed to a power-sharing deal – with South African State President F.W. de Klerk becoming Deputy President under Nelson Mandela in a government of national unity.

People don’t like change, in general. When faced with it, we want assurances that things are going to turn out alright. Don’t we? I guess, in that regard, demons are very similar to us. The demons end up going into the pigs, with Jesus’ permission. But it didn’t last very long. “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,” (verse 33).

It’s remarkable, Jesus shows mercy even to demons. He let’s them go into the pigs instead of sending them to the Abyss. In Mark’s account of this event, he indicates there were 2,000 pigs in the herd (Mark 5:13). In the Old Testament, and even when this event originally happened, Jewish people considered pigs to be unclean animals. They weren’t allowed to eat them. If you were a Jew and you ate bacon or a pork chop, you were unclean. If you were a Jew, and you herded pigs, you were unclean.

## **Natural Reactions**

We talked earlier that this happens in an area where the population is largely Gentile, or at least governed by Gentiles. Naturally, “when those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside,” (verse 34). Raising hogs was big business then, and it still is today. Whoever lost this herd lost a substantial amount of money!

The response of the townspeople is also a natural response to hearing the news that the herd has drowned. “The people went out to see what had happened,” (verse 35a). It’s like that story of the boy who cried wolf. He cries wolf, the people come out, see no wolf, and go about their business. The kid does this a few times, and everyone runs out to deal with the wolf, only to find there isn’t one. So when the wolf finally shows up, and the kid goes running to town to tell everyone no one believes him, and the town loses their flock of sheep.

These pig-farmers have never seen anyone do what Jesus did, and they take off running to tell everyone they see. When the people hear it, they go out to see what all the commotion is about. Look, if something like this happened today, we’d be going and checking it out, wouldn’t we? We would want to know what’s going on.

Notice what they find – it’s not what they expect! “When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid!” (verse 35). They knew the guy who had been possessed. Some of them had probably wrestled with him trying to put his clothes on, or chain him up. But here he is, sitting still – perfectly calm, made whole at the feet of Jesus Christ!

## **Big Financial Cost, Priceless Gain?**

Friends, that's you and me! When we meet Jesus, He doesn't leave us naked, battered and bruised, or crippled by torments – He changes us. If we let Him, if we follow Him, He fills us up with His own Spirit and puts us in our right mind! Our right mind is His mind! Well, it scared the people that day. Check out verse 36, "Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured." Cured. See that? He was made whole. The demons were gone – and they weren't coming back.

Out of their fear the people ask Jesus to leave the area. Get out of town, in other words. And Jesus "got into the boat and left," (verse 37b). There's something in that which we often miss in our "my way or the highway" attitudes towards most things. Jesus doesn't fuss at them. He just does what they ask Him to do, and He leaves. It's sad, really. I see two possibilities regarding this, or maybe a combination of the two. Were they scared that Jesus has power over demons – they were spiritual people after all, and thought He might change them? Or were they were too concerned about the financial cost of keeping Jesus around because they cared more about a herd of swine than the priceless gain made when a fellow bearer of God's image was made whole? The world often reacts to the gospel the same way today.

The last thing Luke tells us in this story, is that "the man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with Him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return home and tell how much God has done for you.' So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him," (verses 38-39). The man wants to be Jesus' disciple. Instead, Jesus tells him to tell others what God had done. Eight years ago I preached at the Alpha Center, in downtown Sidney for the first time, when New Hope had an evening meal.

Friends, that's coming up, by the way, on July 5. Our brothers and sisters in Sidney need you. If you can help, let us know. Anyhow, after I preached the first time down there, I had an older gentleman come up and say to me, "Jesus and God are not the same thing." I really wrestled with that for awhile. I think he was wanting me to recognize the distinctions between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – but friends, Jesus is God! The man in the passage today went back into town, and told every person he saw how much Jesus had done for him! We're called to do that, too!

On this Father's Day, if you have a chance to celebrate with your dads, grandfathers, or other father-figures, take some time and talk with them about what Jesus has done for you. And as you get ready to leave here, to go out into a world hell-bent on the madness of have and have-not, be calm and bold – tell people of every shape, shade, and persuasion all the great things Jesus has done, and continues to do for you! Thanks be to God for sending us a Savior who loves, liberates, and lives within us! Let's pray.

**Prayer:** God our refuge and hope, when race, status, or gender divide us, when despondency and despair haunt and afflict us, when community lies shattered: Comfort and convict us with the stillness of Your presence, that we may confess all You have done, through Christ to whom we belong and in whom we are one. Amen.