

There is Another King: Jesus

Luke – Acts

Jesus Heals Our Fragmented Identity

Luke 8:26 – 39

Introduction: Listening to Many Voices

We're going to study together what it means to listen to many voices. I want to tell you this morning about a conversation I had with a dear friend of mine. He and I have been friends for 14 years now, ever since our freshman year of high school, when we played water polo together. Out of all of my friends in my year, he was the first to start driving, so some of us made him drive everywhere: Let's go to the movies! Let's go to the dance! This dance is boring; let's leave this dance and go to Denny's! There were always many voices in my friend's life. Certainly his parents' voices rang loud in his ears, because they constantly told him what he should do with his life and that he was never good enough. His parents owned an import-export business but they told him horror stories about the business world. He thought about being a professor. But meanwhile, his aunt, uncle, and cousins always told him to be a doctor. So many voices were speaking in him. My friend was also sensitive about being short, and it made him listen a little bit more attentively to voices that told him how he could be larger in his reputation. But he got involved in so much he felt fragmented. When he got into Stanford off the waiting list, he felt like he had to prove to himself and everyone else that he really deserved to be there, so he plunged into his work. All this came to a head when, during our senior year, we were driving to San Jose Airport. He had an interview, and he had asked me to drop him off at the airport. So on the way, I said, "Hey, you seem to be a little more negative than usual. How are things going?" He said, "Well, I can't seem to rest. I got into USC med school, but my parents don't want me to go there because they don't think it's good enough. Nothing I ever do is good enough." In fact my friend had seemed to internalize his parents' voices, "Nothing I ever do is good enough." And here's the thing that killed me: He actually said, "But the only measurement of success I've ever had is how many people I please." I couldn't believe how honest my friend was being with me. How would you respond to that? Looking back, I wish I had said something like this: "Sounds like you are tyrannized by all those voices. It seems to me that you don't have a stable sense of your identity, and that you need to find a true identity by listening above all to Jesus' voice."

Context:

We are in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus is showing his earliest followers how to understand him. He is disclosing himself slowly as the promised king of Israel, who would also be the ruler of the world. He's doing this slowly because their understanding of the word 'king' – and ours as well – needed to be radically shifted. Who is this man, this Jesus?

The Suffering Man: v.26-27

Verse "26 And they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee." The scene is the southeastern shore of the sea of Galilee, near the mouth of the Jordan River. Gerasa was one of ten cities in a league called the Decapolis, which had been mostly a Greek settlement since the time of Alexander the Great. They were on an important trade route, so the city of Gerasa was very prosperous. They had temples to Artemis and Zeus there, and two magnificent theatres. In fact, a hundred years later, in AD 129-130, the Emperor Hadrian would be so impressed with this city that he paid them a visit and built an arch of triumph in Gerasa.

Yet in spite of the greatness, just outside this city is death like you've never seen it. The time is most likely night. The moon shines through broken clouds; it casts eerie shadows around the shore and the sea. The hills are made of limestone rock, and the limestone is peppered with caves. Those caves are used for graves. It seems like death is breathing through those holes. Jesus and his disciples get out of their small boat. The disciples are shaken and exhausted, and after pulling up their boat onto the shore, they're ready to lie down on the ground and rest.

But out of the darkness comes a man, and he heads straight for Jesus! Verse 27: "And when he had come out onto the land, he was met by a certain man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had

not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs.” Now is it just me, or does this sound like The Exorcist to you?! What kind of guy lives among the tombs? And what is his life like?”

There are some painful contrasts being drawn about this man. First of all, he apparently owned a house in the city, but now he lives in the graveyard. If he lived in 21st century Boston, we would say that he once lived on Newbury Street, but now he lives in the Arlington Cemetery. It’s ironic not just because of the total reversal, but because you would have thought that his best chance to get healed and get treated was in the city. After all, that’s where skilled people live. But society could only restrain him, as we learn in v.29. “He was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard; and yet he would burst his fetters and be driven by the demon into the desert.”

This poor man has been demonized for years. Later in v.30, we find out this group of demons called themselves “Legion” after a Roman legion, which is a group of six thousand soldiers. When Jesus casts the demons out, according to Mark they demonize two thousand pigs. So this guy has between two to six thousand demonic voices ringing in his head! He is totally fragmented. He even names himself in v.30 after his problem, “My name is Legion.” I am multiple people. There is no one “me.”

Imagine how he watched other people approach him with chains in their hands. Maybe they came with faces of fear or anger. Not to be friends with him, but to surround him, to put him chains, and to hold him down. This happened over and over. Their best efforts to help failed, so all that was left was to chain him up and control him. Society said, “You’re dangerous and a freak, but we don’t know what to do. We’ve tried educating you, indoctrinating you with responsibilities, laws, rituals, and family bonds. But nothing works. So we’ve got to chain you up and imprison you.” But now he cannot be restrained. He will not be chained. He gets so angry that he tears apart chains with his bare hands.

This poor guy was naked, too. No one took care of him and he couldn’t care for himself. He had very little human dignity left. How did he feel being so uncared for? He’s alone. All he has are those voices ringing in his head.

Now that he sees Jesus, maybe he was filled with dread. “Oh no, here’s someone who’s going to hurt me again. He’s going to use me again. He’ll be frightened of me. He’ll hate me.” But at the same time, maybe deep inside, he wondered if he would love him and set him free?” With whatever sanity he has left, bleeding and scratched, he comes to Jesus. He’s fragmented, looking for peace. He falls to his face before Jesus.

When I started imagining this man, I thought, “My goodness! But how in the world does this relate to me?” You might be wondering how it relates to you.

Peter Sellers was the famous British radio personality and actor who played Inspector Clouseau in the Pink Panther movies. Having played so many roles throughout his working life, he reached an identity crisis in his final days as he lay suffering with a terminal illness. During an interview, he was asked what his thoughts were about the many roles and many radio voices he had played during his storied career. His answer is haunting. He quietly said: “I only wish I knew which voice was my own.” He didn’t know who he was. He was legion.

When the Diary of a Jewish girl named Anne Frank was discovered, her last entry, dated the day before she was taken, read: “I’ve already told you before that I have, as it were, a dual personality...My lighter superficial side will always be too quick for the deeper side of me and that’s why it will always win. You can’t imagine how often I’ve already tried to push this Anne away, to cripple her, to hide her, because after all, she’s only half of what’s called Anne: but it doesn’t work and I know, too, why it doesn’t work...I’m awfully scared that everyone who knows me as I always am will discover that I have another side, a finer and better side. I’m afraid they’ll laugh at me, think I’m ridiculous and sentimental, not take me seriously. I’m used to not like being taken seriously but it’s only the “light-hearted” Anne that’s used to it and can bear it; the “deeper” Anne is too frail for it...Therefore, the nice Anne is never present in company, has not appeared one single time so far, but almost always predominates when we’re alone. I know exactly how

I'd like to be, how I am too...inside. But, alas, I'm only like that for myself...I never utter my real feelings about anything and that's how I've acquired the name of chaser-after-boys, flirt, know-all, reader of love stories. The cheerful Anne laughs about it, gives cheeky answers, shrugs her shoulders indifferently, behaves as if she doesn't care, but oh dearie me, the quiet Anne's reactions are just the opposite. If I'm to be quite honest, then I must admit that it does hurt me, that I try terribly hard to change myself, but that I'm always fighting against a more powerful enemy....if I'm quiet and serious, everyone thinks it's a new comedy and then I have to get out of it by turning it into a joke, not to mention my own family, who are sure to think I'm ill, make me swallow pills for headaches and nerves, feel my neck and my head to see whether I'm running a temperature, or in a bad mood. I can't keep that up: if I'm watched to that extent, I start by getting snappy, then unhappy, and finally I twist my heart round again, so that the bad is on the outside and the good is on the inside and [I] keep on trying to find a way of becoming what I would so like to be, and what I could be, if ... there weren't any other people living in the world." Anne Frank was legion, because there's more than one of her.

How does your world fragment you? It's not that all the voices are necessarily evil, but the way you deal with them is to let yourself be torn apart by all the voices you're trying to listen to. Maybe you've just gotten yourself into this place where you've got so many different images to maintain, you're not sure which one of them is really you. Maybe the voices of your parents say this: "You need to be successful!!" And you hear that voice if not playing in the background of your memory, then on the phone when you call home. If you're not white in America, sometimes you might feel like you have to listen to the voices of two different communities: You have to be white and black, or white and Asian, or white and Latino, and both sides tell you, you're not white enough, you're not black enough, you're not Asian enough.

The Encounter: v.28-30

28 And seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before him, and said in a loud voice, 'What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.'

Now why would he say "Do not torment me." Who is that talking? The demons? Or the man? If it's the demons, then it means they're afraid Jesus will send them into the abyss where demons will ultimately go. If it's the man, then it was painful for the man to let the demons go. Which is it? WE DON'T KNOW. Luke gives a reason in v.29, "For he had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man." But again, it's not clear from that whether the demons or the man was talking.

Let's try and figure this out. The Greek word "to torment" (basanizo) comes from the root word "to torture," so this is intense pain. Furthermore, it is translated once in Matthew 14:24, "to batter" as when the waves were battering the fishing boat. It is also used of a woman suffering labor pains (Rev.12:2). From these occurrences, this word seems to mean pain that comes in waves, once and then again. Torture and torment comes in waves. And Jesus himself is causing that pain.

How? In verse 29 we learn that Jesus "had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man." Here's where we get into something very sinister about this event. It's possible that the man didn't totally want the unclean spirits to leave. For some reason, he wanted to hold on to all of those voices. The biblical narrative is vague, and perhaps deliberately, because we have to consider this possibility. But could it be true? Could it be that the man wants all these voices inside of him? In order to be demonized in the first place, it usually means that you were actively doing something occultic. And the Old Testament view of Gentile cities is that they're places of occultism and demonic activity (see Isa.14 and Ezk.28). So it's not unreasonable to say that this man at some point invited those demons in and now he wants to keep them so much so that it is torment for Jesus to force those voices out.

C.S. Lewis had this thought when he was on the verge of accepting Jesus Christ. "All my acts, desires, and thoughts were to be brought into harmony with [God]. For the first time, I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion." (*Surprised by Joy*).

If you sin, then what you're really doing is saying, "I'm going to listen to other voices in addition to Jesus'." Then those voices become more and more powerful in your life. Then you start to have more

voices inside of you that really don't match up at all, like: I'm a Christian AND a workaholic; I'm a Christian AND a people pleaser; I'm a Christian AND a sexual addict; I'm a Christian AND a Buddhist; I love Jesus AND money; I can serve Jesus AND my own selfishness; I can put Jesus first AND my parents first. Sometimes we don't make any real choices; we just try to do everything. That's why inside of you, there are different voices telling you who you are. Then you start SPEAKING in different voices as you try to play all these roles. "Oh yes, praise God," to your Christian friends, but to others, "Hey, I just do what's right for me." And it is costly, because you've got so many voices to listen to and so many voices speak with, so many images to keep up, so many masks to maintain. If any of you are doing this, you're paying for it. You're paying for it. Because it's draining, and because you don't really know who you are. "Your name is LEGION, for you are many."

So if you're like this man with many voices, Jesus is asking you just like he asked him, "What is your name?" Why does Jesus do this? For this man, because Jesus is making this guy realize that he cannot answer this simple question. Who are you? What is your name? This man now has to ask himself, "What IS my name? I have so many voices inside me, I can't tell me from them. I don't know who I am, and it hurts me to answer that question." And then a voice blurts out of his mouth, "My name is Legion, for we are many." That is the most bizarre response. Who's speaking really? The personal pronouns go from the singular to the plural. My name: singular. We are many: plural. He can't answer the question! I have 2,000-6,000 voices inside me. The deeper I let that question go, the more confused I get. That is what is tormenting.

I want to illustrate for you how this affected two people I know. James and Christine dated for two years. During their senior year of college, they had trouble deciding what to do about their relationship. James felt that they could be together no matter what; it's just a matter of commitment. Christine felt more torn; she loved James but didn't know what it meant to be 'in love.' When their friends questioned them, they found disturbing things. James had never really made a hard choice that involved real tradeoffs. He double majored because he didn't want to choose between two options. He became easily overcommitted to things, like the students' association, tutoring, and ministry, especially because he was trying to be a good Christian. He had a hard time anytime he disappointed someone, in part because he was so capable, but in part because his parents demanded a lot of him and he was deeply afraid of failing others. His parents' voices rang in his head, "You've got to do more." This set the pattern for his approach to life. He had wrapped his heart up in fears while he successfully earned people's approval, and he was a victim of these voices. He thought if he tried hard enough, he could make nearly anything happen. It was no surprise James thought their relationship could last by strength of will.

Meanwhile Christine wasn't sure if she knew herself well. While she and James were dating, she was attracted to another guy in a casual way. But she was attracted to him for the opposite reasons she liked James. Christine thought this other man was reckless, flirtatious, and even a bit superficial, but she had felt attracted nevertheless. The situation had resolved itself because this other guy started flirting with another woman, not because of any concrete decision on Christine's part. Christine was also unable and unwilling to take a stand in her inner conflict. In spite of the fact that Christine was a Christian and knew about certain Bible passages that challenged her, she never seriously questioned her parents' affluence, opinions about who she should marry, opinions about other people, or vision of her future lifestyle. Whenever she had questions about her future, she would eventually come back around to agree with her parents. Her individuality and individual relationship with God had never really developed because Christine had been sheltered and she feared the voice of rejection. She, too, had never made a hard tradeoff, like choosing to obey God when it meant disagreeing with her parents.

So when their friends approached them and said, "We're not sure about your relationship, but what's clear to us is this other underlying issue," they recoiled. They avoided the subject, they tried to bring the conversation to an end, and basically they didn't want to face up to it. They were saying, "Don't torment me! This is the only way I've known how to live my life!"

If you read the Old Testament, you find a pattern of sin leading to fragmentation and many voices. Genesis 1-11 begins with all Creation at rest, humanity at rest, and God's one voice. But it ends with sin, all humanity fragmented at Babel, and many voices. Then, the nation of Israel follows God's voice. But then,

they sin by listening to the voices of fear or doubt or disbelief, and they become fragmented by civil war, they have two kings and countless false prophets. We've got a fragmented humanity, a fragmented nation, and finally here in Luke 8, we find a fragmented individual. This is the most intense point I see in the development of this pattern. Being legion is the result of not finding your identity in Christ. Sooner or later, it always happens. But now, we're going to see who can reverse it.

Who can reverse this pattern? Answer: The God of Israel, who said, "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is ONE." And the Son of that God, who is ONE with the Father and who becomes ONE with us, to make us ONE.

The Healing: v.31-37

Now we'll look at the healing: "32 Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain, and the demons entreated him to permit them to enter the swine. And he gave them permission. 33 And the demons came out from the man and entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned. 34 When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and in the country. 35 And the people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened."

Now there are three major changes that happen in those verses. First is the change in the demons. They cannot stay in Jesus' presence and in v.32 the demons go into a pack of pigs. To a Jew, swine is unclean. So the situation is poetic from a Jewish perspective. The unclean spirit takes on unclean flesh. Jesus makes what was invisible visible, just as he had done with the man, revealing what had been going on inside him. And he sets the situation aright. The pigs tumble down a steep hill and drown.

The second change is in the man. The man is now sitting down as opposed to wildly crying out. He is clothed as opposed to naked. He is in his right mind as opposed to being raving mad. He's let Jesus heal him. He's stopped hurting himself. Finally, we have a picture of a person at rest, whole, and complete in Christ.

I love this picture because for most of my life, (in my teenage years) I listened to all kinds of voices. I had different groups of friends and I was proud of that. My high school was 70% Asian and with them I was intense and goal-oriented. But my swimming friends were entirely non-Asian, and with them I was laid back and a party-goer. By my senior year of high school, I was in student government with my friends thinking that we ran the school, so we thought of ourselves as having different faces: one face for the parents, one face for the administration, and one face to the students. We thought we were so sophisticated. Then I went to college, and right away I started hanging out with the Grateful Dead crowd because my roommate was a pot-smoking Grateful Dead fan. This type of thing went on until I had a dream one night. I dreamed that all my friends from my different worlds were suddenly getting together at my house. And I was paralyzed. I didn't know how to act! I woke up in a cold sweat. I asked God to peel back in my mind each of the layers of me, and I discovered after many layers being peeled, I was an onion! I had skins but no core. That drove me to Jesus. His voice defined me, he set me in my right mind, and now I don't have dreams like that anymore.

Let me go back to the story of James and Christine. Those two people had never gone through any identity-pruning struggles. In other words, they had never listened to Jesus' voice above everyone else's. While on the outside, they seemed like solid people, on the inside, they were fragmented and living by many voices. They avoided conflict with others and avoided making their own hard choices. So what happened to their relationship? It dragged on for a year after they graduated, and then they went through a confusing breakup. James learned fairly quickly after that that he had been listening to too many voices, and he needed to put Jesus' voice first. It wasn't until years later that Christine came to the same conclusion. She was engaged when she realized she didn't have consistent reasons for liking the guys she dated. They were all different because she didn't know who she was. Watching the movie *Runaway Bride*, about a woman who repeatedly runs from grooms at the altar, struck a chord. She realized she had just adapted herself to different voices and put on different personas each time. It was more important for her to be liked than to *be someone*.

The third change is in the other Gentile inhabitants. From the city and the country, they come to see this Jesus. And they become frightened (phobeo). Literally, they were put to flight, they were terrified. Look at verse 35-37: “And the people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. And those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked him to depart from them; for they were gripped with great fear; and he got into a boat and returned.”

The people’s response is: Go away! Depart! Why? Don’t they like what Jesus has done? No. It’s because Jesus will punt and jettison everything unclean in them, all the other voices. They can sense his holiness and his authority, and they don’t like it. And so they act just like the demons, except worse. They entreat Jesus, just like the demons did. They beg him. But whereas the demons asked permission to leave Jesus’ presence, the people send Jesus away. That is how people reject Jesus today just as they did then.

The Proclamation: v.38-39

Fortunately Jesus does not let them forget him in verses 38-39: “But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging him that the might accompany him; but he sent him away, saying, “Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you.” And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.”

So Jesus left the man healed as a witness, a sign. It was not yet time for Jesus’ full ministry to the Gentiles. First he had to finish his mission to Israel, but one day he would return in the person of the Holy Spirit indwelling his apostles. And Jesus wanted this community to be ready for those apostles to come back and speak with the voice of God the Spirit. So it is now. Jesus heals us, and sends us into our communities, to tell the whole city of Boston what great things Jesus has done for us.

How many voices are we listening to? Are we listening first and foremost to God’s voice? I want to close by telling you a story by Max Lucado called *The Wemmicks*. The Wemmicks were a wooden people that lived in their own town. They had all been made by Eli the Woodcutter. All day long, the Wemmicks gave each other stickers. If a Wemmick was tall, or good-looking, or jumped far, the other Wemmicks would gather round and give that Wemmick gold stars. But if a Wemmick had chipped wood, or fell down, or was clumsy, that Wemmick would get gray dots from the others. Well one of the Wemmicks was named Punchinello. He wasn’t especially good looking so he got gray dots. He wasn’t especially talented so he got more gray dots. In fact, the other Wemmicks gave him gray dots just because he had so many gray dots already. Punchinello felt rotten. Then he met a Wemmick named Lucia who had no stickers on her. Punchinello watched as other Wemmicks came up to her and tried to make a gold star stick on her, but it fell off. Others tried to make gray dots stick on her, but they fell off, too. Punchinello asked her, “What is it about you that these stickers don’t stick?” Lucia replied, “I go to see Eli the Woodcutter, and I listen to him.” Punchinello went to Eli’s cottage on the edge of town, and he was greeted by a booming voice. “Hello, Punchinello!” “You know my name?” asked Punchinello. “Of course I do. I made you. I see you’ve been given a lot of gray dots by the others.” Punchinello looked down and said, “Yes. I came because I met someone who had no marks. Why don’t the stickers stay on her?” “Because she has decided that what I think is more important than what they think. They stickers only stick if you let them. And I think you’re pretty special, Punchinello. I love you. The more you trust my love, the less you care about their stickers.” And as Punchinello left Eli’s cottage, a gray dot fell to the ground.