

Luke 8:26 – 39

²⁶ Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ And when he came out onto the land, he was met by a 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. ²⁸ Seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before him, and said in a loud voice, ‘What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.’ ²⁹ For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard, and yet he would break his bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert. ³⁰ And Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Legion’; for many demons had entered him. ³¹ They were imploring him not to command them to go away into the abyss. ³² Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and the demons implored him to permit them to enter the swine. And he gave them permission. ³³ And the demons came out of the man and entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. ³⁴ When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. ³⁷ And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear; and he got into a boat and returned. ³⁸ But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging him that he might accompany him; but he sent him away, saying, ³⁹ ‘Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you.’ So he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Gerasa* was a region on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, populated by Gentiles
- *Tombs* were considered unclean by Jews, as were *pigs*
- *Legion* was a term for a unit in the Roman army
- *Echoes of the Exodus Victory*: When God delivered Israel the first time, from Egypt, He helped them cross a sea, and then drowned the pursuing Egyptian soldiers into the sea. Jews expected God to enact a ‘second Exodus’ to deliver Israel again (Isa.43:1 – 2). For Jesus to help his disciples cross a sea, then drown demons, invokes the image of the second Exodus.

Questions

1. The political overtones: This is the first time Jesus is in Gentile territory. What do you think of the parallels to Jesus' first act in Israel?
 - a. The Jewish Exodus overtones: This event echoes the Passover and Exodus deliverance from Egypt.
 - b. What if the demon had been named 'The U.S. Marines'? Touchy, huh? Rome's army was broken up into 'legions.' So this is somehow related to Rome's power. Is Jesus then sending a message to Rome?
 - c. The demons are an invading and occupying force. Evil is an invading and occupying force in human experience. Recall from Luke 4:14 – 30, Jesus has come to liberate humanity (to set the captives free) by being LORD.
 - d. Notice that in Luke's second volume, Acts, the gospel message goes to Rome via the apostle Paul. This is probably a signal Jesus is giving to Rome, saying, 'I am here to take charge and kick butt.'
 - e. Application: Only when we follow Jesus into ministry and experience him being victorious will we understand him as Deliverer. God won a victory by bringing Israel out of bondage to slavery in Egypt. God in Jesus won a deeper and more profound victory by bringing people out of bondage to slavery to the other forces of evil.
2. The man's experience:
 - a. Describe this man's internal life. How many voices does this man hear? What might these voices say to him?
 - b. Based on his own experience, what might this man think of anyone who tries to help him?
 - c. Why does he hurt himself by gashing and bruising himself?
 - d. Why does he say to Jesus, 'Do not torment me?'
 - e. Who is speaking? The man or the demons? Notice that the text is unclear about it. It might be the demons, but notice that in v.10, the man is speaking, and he seems unwilling that demons go too far away.
 - f. If it's the man not willing to let go of the demons, why might he want to hold on to all those voices?
3. Why do we want to hold onto all the voices we try to hold together inside of us?
 - a. What voices are those?
 - b. Why is it attractive to live by so many voices? How does it ultimately hurt us to do that?
 - c. Illus: In the movie *Runaway Bride*, Julia Roberts' character didn't know how she liked her own eggs. She always just adjusted to the man she was dating. Then she would get engaged and leave her fiancé at the altar because she was defined by too many voices.
 - d. Illus: 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.
 - e. Application: 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.
4. Note on the bigger picture of the Gentile problem: If you read the Old Testament, you find a pattern of sin leading to fragmentation and many voices.
 - a. All humanity: 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.
 - b. Israel: 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.

- c. Individual: 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.
 - d. 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.
5. Why is it hard to live by one voice, Jesus' voice?
 - a. Notice in the parable of the soils (Lk.8:1-21), it's all about receiving the word of Jesus. But there are distractions that we get caught up in, as well as the devil. Notice also when Jesus calmed the stormy sea, it's all about the power of Jesus' word. But there are moments when we don't trust him, when we don't believe that his word can bring life out of death.
 6. The healing: What change happens to:
 - a. The demons? They cannot stay in Jesus' presence and in v.32 the demons go into a pack of pigs.
 - b. 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.
 - c. The townspeople? 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.
 7. Let's flesh out these changes in more detail. The demons:
 - a. How would Jews have regarded swine flesh? As unclean.
 - b. What is the spirit called in v.29? Unclean.
 - c. Why might Jesus put unclean spirits into unclean flesh? So the situation would be 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.
 8. The man:
 - a. How many voices does the man listen to now? Jesus above all others.
 - b. What is attractive about this man's life now?
 - c. Illus: 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.
 - d. Why didn't Jesus take the man? 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.
 - e. Likewise, why doesn't Jesus just take us to heaven? Jesus heals us and sends us into our communities, to tell the whole city of Boston what great things Jesus has done for us.
 - f. Is there any significance to the fact that the healed man left the tombs and proclaimed what 'Jesus had done for him?'
 - g. How can we leave our tombs and proclaim what Jesus has done for us?
 9. The townspeople:
 - a. Why is their response 'Go away! Depart!'
 - b. Don't they like what Jesus has done? No.
 - c. What do they recognize? That 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.

- d. What is their request? They ask Jesus to leave.
 - e. Who else made a similar request? The demons, except the people are 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.
10. Closing: 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.