
Have you ever been in a situation in which you sensed an evil presence or power? If so, what were the circumstances and how did you respond? At a previous church I served there was an unusual visitor at church one Sunday morning. Evil seemed to radiate from him. I tried to carry on a conversation with him, but I couldn't stop thinking something wasn't right about this man. I found myself deeply concerned about this man. I had never experienced such a feeling. I had welcomed people to worship who were - skeptics, atheists, Muslims and plenty of old pagans. I watched him as the service took place, not out of fear but to see his response to God's truth. He got up from his seat and started walking to the pulpit and shouting that he wanted to preach. I told him that I had that covered. Finally he took a seat. But he kept getting up and walking around during the service and talking to himself. It certainly seemed that this man was either mentally ill or demon possessed or both. Jesus was confronted one day by a man screaming in agony. Behind his screams, Jesus sensed another presence - the presence of an evil spirit.

Commentary Lesson

In the first century, this story probably had its greatest impact in affirming Jesus' power over demonic spirits. Jesus' compassion can be clearly seen in this story, as well as it is foreshadowing of the apostles victories over demons and pagan magic (Acts 8:9-24, 13:6-12,16:16-18, 19:11-20). William Barclay points out that we will never begin to understand this story unless we realize that, whatever we think about demons, for the people of Gerasa they are intensely real. This man was too dangerous to live with people so he lived amongst the tombs, which were believed to be the home and the haunt of demons. We may well note the sheer courage of Jesus in dealing with his unstable man. The townspeople were so terrified of him that they would never try to do anything for him; but Jesus faced him calm and unafraid. In our day, we have become accustomed to attribute strange behavior to emotional or mental problems, but not demon possession. The remedy is not an exorcism, but counseling or medication. When Jesus asked the man his name, he answered "Legion." A Roman legion was a regiment of 6,000 soldiers. Perhaps this poor man had seen a Roman legion on the march, and it affected his mind to thinking that he was possessed by a whole legion of demons. The story of the Gerasene demonic should now be interpreted so that it speaks a word of assurance and hope to those for whom every day is a battle with depression, fear, anxiety, or compulsive behavior. They will understand what would lead a person to say that his name is "mob." With
such a response, the man acknowledged that he had no longer any individual identity. He had lost his name. All that was left was a boiling struggle of conflicting forces. It was as though a Roman legion was at war within him.

Jesus honors the request of the demon spirits and sends them into the swine. The people of the town unfortunately valued their bacon more than they did this man's life that was restored. What did the animal rights people say? How can a price tag be placed upon a life is changed and restored to health? But the towns people believed that Jesus had cost them enough and they requested for him to leave their town.

How many families are at their wits end because no one has been able to cure a mentally ill loved one? We no longer use chains and shackles but straight jackets, padded cells, injections, electric shock. But still some mentally ill people are driven "into the wilds" (v.29). This gospel story affirms the compassion of Jesus, which led him to cross a sea to reach such a person and the power of Jesus that healed him and changed his life forever!

The healed man desired to follow Jesus, but Jesus didn't honor this request. It is easier to go and tell people we don't know about the gospel message. Jesus' mission for this healed man was to go to his family, friends, and community and tell them - "how much God has done for you."

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