

Sermon Notes:

June 19, 2022

Focus:

The man called Legion.

Lectionary Readings

This is a story of a Gentile town, a demon possessed man, and a bunch of drowned pigs.

I want to encourage you not to over-spiritualize this one, but as they say in Austin “Keep it weird.”

The message is more nuanced than “Jesus, the exorcist, is rejected by fearful and stupid townspeople.

I want to go through the text more

methodically than I usually do with the hope that you might savor the subversion:

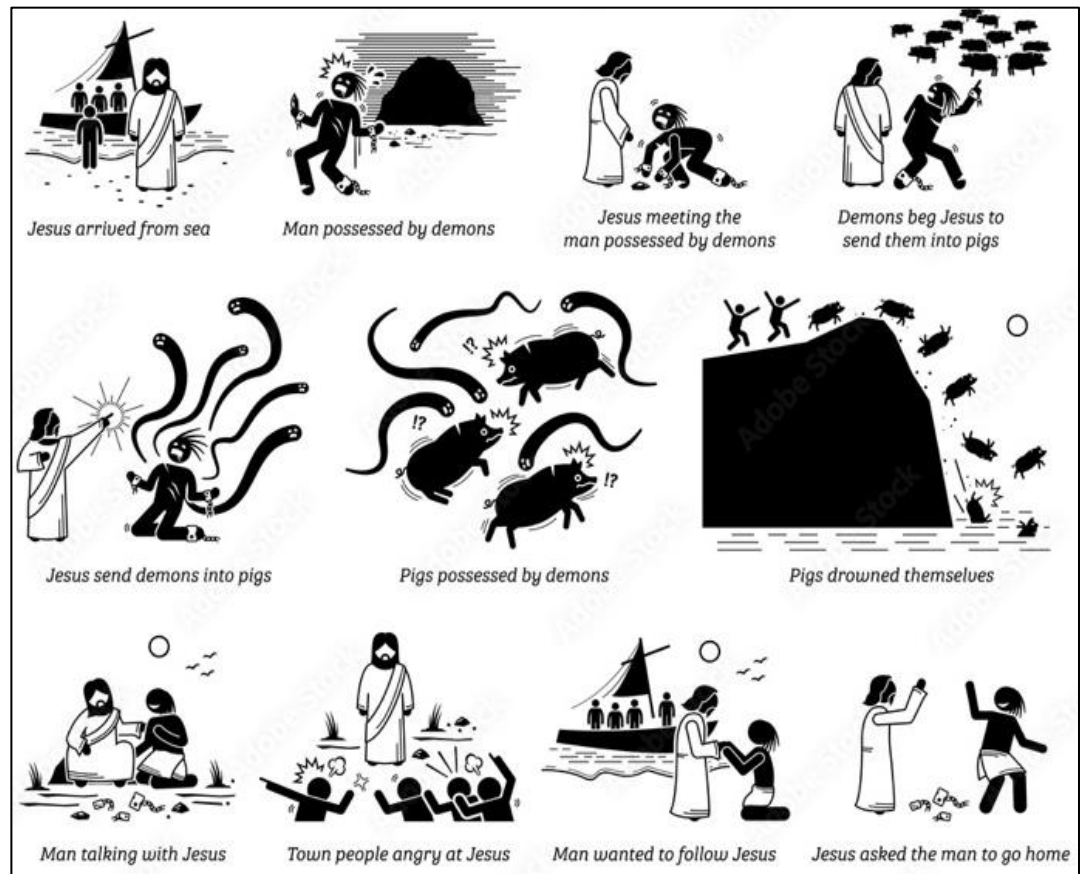
Jesus and his disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time, he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted 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" -- for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man...

What did you notice? Maybe you have heard this story many times. What is weird, or at least noteworthy about this story? Some of the basic elements are that Jesus is crossing from Jewish culture/land to Gentile culture/land. The Gentile land is hard to pinpoint exactly on a map today. You can try to locate the town, but it will be fuzzy at best. Even the name is fuzzy: Gerasa, Gadara, or Gergesa could be the city referenced in scripture.

Zooming out, I think to whom he went is important. The story almost certainly took place in the region of the Decapolis. Deca = 10 | polis = city(ies). The Decapolis was a major center of Gentile (non-Jewish) power and Gerasa and sort of a ranchers' town. **Jesus moved outside his culture, not to comfort Gentiles, but to flip their town upside down, more in a moment.**

Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Names are a big deal in the Bible. To name someone or a thing or to know the name of something is powerful. The possessed man was also pulling a power move by naming Jesus.



In my opinion, Calling Jesus “Son of the Most High” was not a form of worship, but an attempt to control the situation.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So, he gave them permission. Then 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.

This is where it gets weird. The moral of the story is less about those darn Gerasenes not loving Jesus enough. **But they were afraid he might wreak more devastation upon them.** Pigs of this town were a major part of the economy. If you’re an average gentile of the Decapolis, you would have loved a pulled-pork street taco for lunch. Jesus letting the demons kill the pigs devastated the local economy. If a miracle worker came into town and destroyed your livelihood, you might not be as keen to sing praises to God. But Jesus’ care centered on one man, who had been ostracized and tormented. Jesus cared for the one over the many in this story.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So, he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So, he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him

I would have been heartbroken if I were Legion. If everyone I knew had treated me like garbage and drove me into the tomb, then I would be hard pressed to go back and preach the love of God to those who ostensibly were my tormenters.

I leave you with a guy name Morgan Guyton. He writes about going to a Sunday School where the class did not instinctively bash the people of Gerasa, Gadara, or Gergesa. He writes,

*“But there were some brave people in this particular Sunday school class. And they kept on saying things like wow, it must have really sucked for those swineherds to lose their entire livelihood when Jesus cast the demons into their pigs.... He was willing to crash a local economy in order to make life better for a single outcast. This is consistent with the Jesus who talks about leaving the 99 sheep who are sticking together to find the one who is lost. Jesus cares that deeply about each human on this planet.”*¹

I like how people saw the unreasonable Jesus, the person-focused Jesus. It is like he did everything wrong in the popularity contest. His north star was blessing the broken, healing the sick, and drawing in the outcast. He did these even when it crashed a stock market. He commissioned Legion and us to do the same.

Todd

1. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/mercynotsacrifice/2019/06/26/the-time-jesus-crashed-an-economy-to-heal-an-outcast/>
The Time Jesus Crashed an Economy to Heal an Outcast. June 26, 2019, Morgan Guyton. Accessed June 9, 2022.