

## Free To Tell All and Live!

**Text:** Luke 8:26–39

**Other Lessons:** Isaiah 65:1–9; Psalm 3; Galatians 3:23–4:7

**Sermon Theme:** Jesus sets you free.

**Sermon Goal: Goal:** That hearers will see themselves in the place of the Gerasene demoniac—utterly helpless and then restored by Christ.

A familiar story. One writer says it is the only one in scripture that deals with "deviled ham." Yuck, yuck. The narrative builds around the sensitivities of Jewish piety. Pigs were the personification of uncleanness. (1) They were easily associated with Gentile uncleanness. Tombs were also a source of uncleanness, and in Jewish areas they were whitewashed so that one might not come in contact with a tomb accidentally.(2) A man with no clothes on would be an outcast since nakedness was shameful.(3) Unclean! Unclean! "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" And moments later, the demons...the uncleanness...gone. Praise the Lord!

No question, modern ears have trouble hearing this story. We would understand it better if the poor man in the graveyard were simply described as mentally ill. We are not comfortable in either giving credit or blame for the events of our lives to unseen beings. We would rather understand the story as one more example of Jesus' deep compassion for hurting individuals and an affirmation of his marvelous power to heal even when our afflictions are "legion." But that would misunderstand the story. This one is about MORE than healing; this one is about confronting evil - in the language of first century theology, DEMONS. The townspeople had been content to control it by isolating it on the outskirts of their society - the graveyard - but Jesus was prepared to get rid of it all together, even though, as the story makes clear, the society at large was not ready to have that happen. He did it anyway. And the message I get from this story is "Go, thou, and do likewise."

Say what? Me? Cast out demons? Absolutely. In a sense, what your church will be doing this next week in Las Vegas is a contemporary follow-up to that lesson. The 46th District Convention of the Pacific Southwest District (LCMS) will gather, not simply to set policy for our district, but in a wider sense to join Jesus in doing battle with the demons - the evil which confronts us at every turn.

Everyday begins with worship. This is not merely an ecclesiastical convenience - it says what we believe is important by putting it first on our schedule. First and foremost, the church is a worshipping community.

The presence of Christ transforms human existence. In addition to the reality of demon possession, the natural human experience is to be possessed by a series of "demons," the greatest of which is rebellion against God and self-love (a fundamental breaking of the First Commandment). Every human being by nature is terrified of God, resists him, and fears him. Our lives apart from God show that we are "a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following [our] own devices" (*Old Testament Reading*, Is 65:2). In all too real ways, we give evidence of being at odds with God and look much like the demon-possessed man in the *Gospel*. "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me" (Lk 8:28). But God is not content that we should perish. He sends Christ for us, and when Jesus comes into our lives that perspective is fundamentally changed. We see God as he truly is, one who shows us his steadfast love and grants us his salvation by sending his Son to pay the price for our redemption and be our salvation. Because in "Christ Jesus you are all sons and daughters of God, through faith" (*Epistle*, Gal 3:26), even now as we struggle with the demons that seek to drive us from the faith, the Scriptures invite us to cry aloud to our Father for protection and strength. For "you, O

**Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill” (Psalm 3:3–4).**

Doing battle with demons. It is part of what Jesus does. It is part of what we as Christ's church do. As they are being fought, these battles are not pretty. There is pain. Sometimes pigs die. But evil, by its very nature is destructive, so pain should be expected. No wonder society at large is uncomfortable with the process, even to the extent of asking Jesus to leave.

In the first century, demons were a scary business. They were thought to be able to take control of natural processes and often were thought to take possession of persons or control their fate. The demons could enter a person through the ears, nose, or mouth. Amulets, magic, sacrifices, and rituals were needed if one were to have any hope of appeasing or escaping these spiritual powers. But then we meet Jesus and find that HE has a power these demons cannot match.

For most people today, demon possession may bring up memories of the old movie *The Exorcist* or pictures of mental illness. But for the people of Jesus' time—indeed, for Jesus himself—demon possession was a present reality. The world was a very dangerous place, as Luke 8 makes clear. Through the Word of Jesus, the disciples have just escaped certain destruction. Caught by a storm on the unpredictable Sea of Galilee, they have seen Jesus' power and authority over the tempests of nature. Now they are about to see Jesus exercise his power and authority over a spiritual storm—the hurricane of demonic power over human beings. Not only do the winds and water obey him, but his power, grace, and mercy are able even to restore that which human sin has destroyed.

#### The Abiding Presence of Christ Transforms Human Experience.

It's as Jesus will say in Mt 28:18–20: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Does the story of the Gerasene demoniac speak to OUR day as it did its own? Absolutely! To the church which battles the demons of social evil, the message is there is hope in Jesus. To individuals for whom there is an everyday battle ongoing with the demon of depression, the message is there is hope in Jesus. To those who battle the demon of fear, the message is there is hope in Jesus. Those who fight the demon of addiction, the message is there is hope in Jesus. And to those who have SO MANY BATTLES going on against SO MANY DEMONS that their name is LEGION, the message is there is hope in Jesus.

Christ's presence transforms demon possession (or possession by **our** “demons”) into being clothed and in our right minds.

The Gerasene demoniac is more like us than we may realize (vv 26–30).

This poor man was tormented by a legion of demons, that is, three to six thousand demons!

For a long time he had worn no clothes, he had not lived in a house, and even shackles and chains could not hold him.

He was experiencing a living death, even literally—a life among the tombs

Imagine the depth of this man's burden and defenselessness and vulnerability.

We, as sinners, are also troubled by “demons.”

Our “demons,” too, can be a life of isolation—from God and other people. Behind them is always rebellion against God, and they can take forms of temper, temptations, abuses, and abuse. Alcohol and drug abuse are just two examples.

We were also utterly and completely helpless to change our situation. The fetters of the Law only enrage us. The Law was not meant to be the means for human beings to save themselves (Epistle, Gal 3:23–25).

But the word of Christ is authoritative (Lk 4:32) to change these tragic human realities.

The merciful Christ changes all things for the better for this man (vv 32–35b).  
He is clothed and in his right mind. He is restored to his Father's house.

Christ also transforms our experience.

Christ, through his perfect keeping of the Law and through his innocent suffering and death, heals human beings from the effects of sin, death, and the devil. God's kingdom is in your midst, your sins are forgiven, you are restored to God.

How does this happen? Through the preaching of Christ's authoritative Word, through the proclamation of the absolving Word, through the Word and the water in Baptism.

Clothed: in Baptism God has forgiven our sins, making us his family. He has clothed us in the robe of Christ's righteousness.

Right mind: through Christ's Word we learn the depth of his grace and mercy for us.

The center of the story is the healing, redemptive work of Jesus. Here, the man who had been naked and out of control is now found, through the presence and work of Jesus, clothed and calmly sitting at the feet of his true master. The man released from demon possession is brought under God's reign of grace in Jesus. He is spiritually healed, or saved. Here, healing and cleansing from the unclean spirit (8:29) and salvation are all part of Jesus' liberation" (Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 1:1–9:50* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996], 363). However, the response of the people is fear and rejection. Ironically, they are now in the position that the demoniac had been, though they do not recognize their reality. Even though Christ accedes to their request that he leave, he does, in vv 38–39, make provision for their ongoing hearing of his Gospel.

This is all a prelude to Mt 28:18–20.

And Christ even abides to transform rejection by continuing proclamation of the Gospel.

Jesus, having been rejected by the Gerasenes, prepares to return to Galilee. The healed demoniac hopes to follow Jesus in that physical path. Jesus, however, shows the man that just as he (Christ) is returning to preach, so he (the healed man) is also to go "and declare how much God has done for you," namely, to preach Christ. Even though the people have asked Jesus to leave, he will remain with them through the proclamation of his work given by the healed man. The narrative concludes without telling us of the man's relative success or failure, only that "he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him." In this we see the parable of the sower finding its fulfillment (Lk 8:4–8).

What came of the message the longtime demoniac spoke in his town and among his neighbors? We don't know! The Bible doesn't say! Did God use it to plant faith among others who heard this man? The response does not matter so much, since the praises of Jesus are always a glorious thing, even if many people choose not to listen to them. The big thing is to hold before your eyes today the reality of the evil one, the way he seeks to destroy you and others in both body and soul, and to rejoice with all your might that Jesus has conquered him for your sake. Christ covers over

with his own blood the wrongs you did for every time you gave in to the devil. He brings the good news of forgiveness into your life through the word he speaks, lays hold of your heart, and gives you faith to trust him. In the power of his Spirit, he makes you strong to overcome the damage the evil one may have done in your life, and to resist him in any new attack he tries to launch against you. Amen.

Christ continues to make provision for the proclamation of the Gospel to all nations, despite continued rejection. As the Word is preached and the Sacraments are administered, Christ abides with us “always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

We are so technologically advanced that it’s almost too easy to explain away texts like today’s. But it would be impossible to convince the formerly demon-possessed man that demons aren’t real. For him, they were a very real danger to his very being. Then with the arrival of Christ, his demons were driven away, and he was restored to the Father. As Christ came to us through Baptism and as he continues to come to us through his Word, he remains with us always, continually transforming our isolation and desperation into the joy of being our Father’s children, even to the end of the age.

Your church is battling demons today. As it does EVERYDAY. Are there demons that you are battling as well? Just remember, the message is there is hope in Jesus. Then remember the Lord's instruction: "Return to your home, and [tell the story]...tell how much God has done for you."

Let us pray.

O God, there are times when we would rather NOT battle the demons. It is so much easier to give in. Give us the strength for the struggle, for Jesus' sake. Amen!