

Sermon 01 29 17 Count Your Demons or Count Your Blessings Luke 8 26 39

Suddenly, Jesus says to his disciples, “Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.” (Luke 8:22) This command has a rather odd tone. It sounds like a whim or a lark. Or maybe, Jesus does not want to reveal to them the danger they are about to encounter. While they are crossing the lake, a wind storm occurs. Jesus calmed the wind storm and saved his disciples from the hands of darkness and death. The amazed disciples ask each other “Who is this man? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.” (Luke 8:25) Who is this Jesus?

The experience of Jesus and the disciples in Gadare is very strange. They find themselves in a hostile and unclean territory. Jesus is not welcome. The only person who approaches them is a filthy, naked man who lives in the cemeteries. The cemeteries are unclean places. The population is gentile and, therefore, unclean. Even the pigs into which Jesus sent the demons are unclean.

The man who approaches Jesus has been possessed by demons for a long time. He does not wear clothes; he does not live in house but instead in the cemeteries. The demons have victimized him by taking away his dignity and his friends and family. He is not ashamed to be naked.

As soon as Jesus sees this man, he realizes that the man is possessed. There is a dialogue between Jesus, the possessed man, and the demons. The man falls at

Jesus' feet and cries out: "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you don't torture me!"

Jesus orders these unclean spirits to leave the man. But they beg Jesus to send them to a herd of pigs. Surprisingly, Jesus accedes. The result is that the pigs jump off the cliff into the lake. The unclean spirits fall into the abyss, the bottomless pit with the fallen angels and spirits "...in everlasting chains for judgement on the great Day. (Jude 1:6)

Who is this Jesus who commands even the winds and water and they obey him? Who is this Jesus who returns this person to his right mind? Who is this Jesus who orders the demons to leave and they obey? These questions are answered in this unsaved and unclean territory. The answers come from this demon-possessed man. Let us remember that he says: "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" This man recognizes that Jesus is the Son of God. In addition, when Jesus and his disciples are in the boat ready to return to the other side of the lake, the man asks Jesus to let him go with them. Jesus tells him to go home and tell people what God has done for him. Jesus returns the man to the community and to a dignified life. The man goes back and tells people that Jesus changed his life. For this man, Jesus is The Incarnated God.

Another odd element in this journey to gentile territory is the name of the demons: Legion. A legion was a contingent of four to five thousand Roman soldiers. During the time of Jesus when the Roman Empire ruled, the economic and political systems oppressed and dehumanized human beings just as it does today in our country and in other parts of the world. Economic and political oppression frequently deprive human beings of dignity forcing them to live in the streets in filthy conditions. Terrorism is another demonic force that generates violence, oppression and death. Jesus came to clean our world of egotism and greed. He calls us to fight oppressive systems with tenacity and love.

The demon possessed man from Gadare was liberated from a legion of demons and was reconciled with God and his family. Since his encounter with Jesus he felt peace within himself. We are not out of our minds like the demon possessed man from Gadare, although we sometimes act like him. In these moments we have to recognize that we have personal demons acting in us.

These personal demons are the regrets in our minds telling us that we are failures. They are the nightmares that creep into our dreams and destroy them. They are the shadows that lurk in the dark and make us afraid of nothing and everything at the same time. They are the thoughts that haunt us when we are alone. They are the anger that rises up into us without provocation. They are the

sadness that consumes and overwhelms us. These demons are the darkness in the depth of our souls waiting to attack anything and anyone, especially us.

We often do not want to confront our demons. We deny that we have demons or think that we can deal with them on our own. Frequently, we do not want God to interfere in our lives and problems. Sometimes, we blame God for our problems. We say, “leave me alone” when God tries to get our attention.

We have listened to dramatic stories of people who changed their lives because they encountered Jesus and decided to leave their nightmares, fears, loneliness, anger, and sadness behind and let the healing Christ cleanse their souls of their demons. Christ can do the same for you. He can give you a new life in Christ full of new possibilities. Ask Christ to free you from the legion of demons that torment, oppress, and exploit you. Ask Christ to shine on your soul and you will have peace, love, and fullness of life.

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