

This morning, our Gospel lesson centers on an exorcism. The exorcism story is one of the longest healing stories in the Gospels. Thus, there must be something significant to this story. A story that at quick glance could be seen as a simple healing story has a lot more to it, if we are willing to take a risk.

I think that you will see the areas that I am taking some risks with the interpretation and with the implication that it may have for us here at Bay View. To me, it is important for us to examine Scripture in one hand and our context with the other.

Before we dive into the text, I think that this story is another story where we will be helped to understand it within the greater context of Luke.

Our scripture for the day begins with these three key words: *“Then they arrived.”* Who is the they and where were they coming from?

They are Jesus and the disciples. Previous to this story, Jesus and the disciples decided to take a spontaneous boat trip on the lake. Lake Genneserat is where their journey is occurs. For a visual, the lake is 8 miles wide and 13 miles long. While they were out on the lake, a big windstorm occurred. The disciples were freaking out. They truly believed that they were going to die. While they were scared for their life, Jesus was napping so strongly that he was sleeping through the storm. When they woke him up, they said to Jesus, “we are going to drown.” Jesus woke up, rebuked the storm. The storm ceased to exist. He looked at the disciples and said, “where is your faith?”

The disciples were simultaneously fearful and amazed. They looked at one another and wondered aloud, “Who is he that the winds and water obey him?”

They continued their journey. Jesus is always on the move. While he is on the move, he gathers disciples and enemies. We don't often like to think of it, but Jesus had individuals who did not like him. They did not like his teachings. They did not like how he handle his ministry. His focus was not where it needed to be. Earlier in Luke, we hear: the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

I think that it is important to note that the disciples had no idea where they were headed on this spontaneous trip. When they hit shore, they arrive at the country of Gerasenes. As soon as they hit the land, we are thrown into an intense action story.

When we had our bible study on Tuesday, one of the bible study members said, *“wow, this should be a Hollywood movie!”* This is a text and story that many of us have heard countless times, but it is one that is often put on the bookshelf and we do not dive into too deeply.

Today, that changes.

Jesus enters into Gentile territory for the first time ever. As soon as he steps onto the land, he has an encounter with “Legion”. Legion knew who Jesus was, yet the disciples were still uncertain. Intriguing. That could possibly be a sermon in itself, but that is not the direction that we are headed.

The man that Jesus encounters has been living naked and his residence is in the tombs that are built into the cliffs. The townsmen, in the past, had tried to contain him. They provided him clothes and placed him in chains. The chains, in their mind, were to protect themselves and him. It can be said that the man's community attempted to preserve both him and themselves from the power of the demons. The shackling and guarding him allowed them to feed him and keep him

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alive while keeping themselves safe. But, in the end, it did no good. He was too strong for imprisonment. Thus, his life became a life away from all people and he lived among the dead and his family saw him as being dead. One of the most powerful sentences that I heard this week was the following:

His life under the powers of demons is a paradox of being shackled in a fearful community or freed in a terrible loneliness.

As we will see, the encounter is confrontational. I think the confrontation is not unexpected because Jesus has a mission to travel from town to town proclaiming the good news. Some places accept him and some reject him. This place is a place where everyone avoided; yet Jesus was willing to step into this setting. In this setting, Jesus performs one of the most extraordinary miracles that has been recorded.

I want to set the stage by letting you know that Legion is a familiar word to the listeners. The word is actually a title. The title is a word that is used to describe a division of 5,000 roman soldiers. Could it be possible that Luke is using the word Legion very intentionally? Luke seems to be associating the tortured soul with the effects of the imperial Rome's exploitation of its colony. Without a doubt, this story is showing that Jesus is engaged in a dangerous spiritual battle.

An exorcism is about to happen. Luke writes the story in the same form that first century writers shared stories of exorcism. We will not spend time in the sermon on the form. Just know that when the hearers heard, they would have recognized the form. The form was very familiar.

Before the man has the opportunity to address Jesus, Jesus commands the uncleaned spirits to leave him and go into the abyss. The spirits don't seem to be too fond of that idea and they begin the negotiation process with Jesus. The demons' bargain with God and on the onset, it seems like they were successful. The demons make a plea, let us go into the pigs. Jesus obliges. The spirit goes into the pigs and they rush towards the cliff. They go down the steep bank and every single one of them drowns. If we team Luke up with Mark, Mark tells us that it was around 2,000 pigs. Can you imagine that sight? Just for a second close your eyes and imagine 2,000 pigs taking off for the cliff, going into the water, and all of them drown.

A lot of money was lost that day. Individuals have wondered about the pigs and the farm. The two most common responses were that the pigs were used for the Gentile community and their market. However, the other response can bring some intriguing thoughts, this was a pig farm for the Roman soldiers who were occupying the territories.

Those who were tending to the pigs went into the town and countryside to let them know what happened and they came out to witness what occurred. They saw no pigs and they saw the "mad man" dressed and sitting at the feet of Jesus and was in his right mind. They were shocked.

The individuals did not show gratitude. They did not express amazement. Instead of gratitude and amazement, they recognize the power of Jesus and become afraid. They immediately asked Jesus to leave and Jesus goes and gets into the boat with possibly all the dead pigs floating and sailed away. He left the area with the Good News only being accepted by 1 person; not great results right?

Why is that they were afraid? Let's take some time and explore some of the possibilities.

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One: The individuals preferred the demons that they have normalized to the liberating power that is unknown. If we examine our own human condition, we can probably see examples of where and how this plays out; not only in our individual lives but in the life of our church. We are scared of the unknown, even with the unknown can bring greatness.

Two: The villagers may have feared that their neighbor might call attention to his healing and his new lease on life and his lack of fear. The knowledge of this event has the potential for them now to become the focus of Roman attention and targets of violence; especially if the pigs were indeed used for their food.

In contrast, the once-possessed man sits calmly at the feet of Jesus. He has been released from the chains of possession and the deep darkness that clouded his mind. At the end of the story, when the town folks ask Jesus to leave, we see that he wants to get into the boat and follow Jesus. Jesus tells him no and shares with him that his calling is here; in his hometown. He has been restored to his family and his fellow villagers and now he was given the power to bring healing to them. I am sure that this was no easy task for him. It's a tough call that has been given to him. He is to be a witness to individuals who have rejected him for years.

It seems that he is to bring healing to his family and community.

Maybe, as a church community, we really need to examine how we might offer healing and to whom does that healing need to be extended to.

Maybe, as a church community, we need to be like Jesus and be willing to take our ministry into places that many are afraid to go.

I don't think that is a stretch for us when we make the promise at our baptism to serve all people, following the example of Jesus. Amen.