

²⁶They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.

²⁷When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" ²⁹For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

³⁰Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. ³¹And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

³²A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. ³³When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, ³⁵and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ³⁶Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. ³⁷Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹"Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

[PRAY]

What is your name?

Our names are important. Often our names have special stories behind them, just ask Herb Lobdell. Maybe you were named after someone special, or your name itself has a special meaning.

When we know the name of someone, we know something significant; it creates a personal connection. Calling someone by name, can give us leverage, power.

When I was substitute teaching, I was always most grateful when teachers left not only a lesson plan, but seating chart with the names of all the students. Often in primary grades, the student's names were written on a piece of lined tag board, taped to the corner of their desk so they could copy it as they were learning to write. On more than one occasion I would take advantage of that. One day a student was goofing off, when I called him by name:

"Rodney, please get your pencil out and get to work."

He stopped immediately and stared at me with big eyes:

"How did you know my name?" (Forgetting that it was right there on his desk!)

"Mrs. C knows all!" I replied. "Get to work!"

Names in the Bible often carry meaning. For example, "Issac" means "Laughter". He was so named, because his aging parents laughed when God told them they would have a baby and Medicare would pick up the tab!

In this episode in the ministry of Jesus, he and the disciples have been ministering on the west side of the Jordan River, but now they cross over into Gentile territory. There they encounter a demon possessed man. Previously Jesus had done miracles and exorcisms, but this is his first in Gentile territory. The reactions are mixed, to be sure. More about that in a moment.

First, I daresay, we are unfamiliar with demon possession. Perhaps it is not as common now as it once was, or it is more common in other parts of the world than here. That said, I think we can agree that evil itself is evident in our world in countless ways: mass shootings, exploitation of the environment, human trafficking for sex/labor/war, proliferation of pornography, seemingly inescapable cycles of poverty and addiction, domestic violence, and more. Today if one encountered a man like the one in the text, we would say he was deranged or mentally ill, perhaps suffering from "multiple personality disorder". We recognize that all of these conditions are a result of the fact that we live in a fallen world,

we are all sinners in need of God's grace, and the evil one is alive and well in our world today.

However one accounts for this man's condition, what is clear is that he had been suffering for some time: he was outcast and alone, separated from his community, alive but merely existing, naked, dwelling among the dead in the cemetery. To coin a phrase, he is a dead man walking. He is clearly, not himself.

Imagine being greeted by this person, as one comes ashore.

It is interesting to me that that while Jesus does not know him, the evil one(s) within this man, know and correctly identify Jesus.

"What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" (v.28)

The incredible strength of evil has overcome any effort to restrain it: the man has broken fetters of rope and metal. The struggle to overcome the power of the evil one(s) is both internal and external to this man. It appears to be a losing battle; he is lost to himself and to the community to which he once belonged.

Circumstances may coalesce in our lives to separate us from our community; to separate or alienate us from those whom we love, and perhaps even from ourselves. We can become isolated, confused, alone.

Into this situation, Jesus asks the man and us: "What is your name?"

The reply? "Legion." Because, Luke explains, many demons had entered him.

"Legion" of course, is not his given name. It is not who he is. It is what has become of him. He is lost to himself; his identity is shattered. He is dispossessed of himself and his humanity. It is no surprise that he is found living in a cemetery because he has ceased to exist as a vital personality.

"Legion" refers to a cohort of the Roman army that consists of 6000 soldiers. When he says that his name is "legion" he is saying: 'I am fragmented and fractured. My life has dis—integrated. I am broken into 6000 pieces'.

While not demon possessed, I can imagine that on occasion each of us has felt a similar fragmentation; feeling isolated and alone, struggling to make sense of

suffering and loss, having lost our bearings, feeling disconnected from ourselves and those we love, perhaps even from our faith and our relationship with God.

However we might describe it, it is into this very brokenness of our lives that Jesus enters in. Jesus comes to restore, to put the pieces back together again, and to give us back to ourselves. That is what Jesus does for this man. In casting out the demons, the man is returned to himself: no longer demon possessed, he is self-possessed; in his right mind. He is clothed, he is whole, he is healed. His life has come under new management!

But at what cost?

The demons do not want to be thrown into the abyss but that is where they end up anyway. The herd of pigs into which they are cast, run off the cliff and drown. This is a reminder that Jesus is in Gentile territory as Jews were shepherds but not swine herders. This event has had a negative impact on the local economy as the swineherds have been deprived of their livelihood.

If you and I had a loved one so distraught, who is totally restored, I would expect we would be overjoyed and grateful. But that is not the response of the locals. There is no joy in the land of the Gerasenes. Nope. They are filled with fear.

Now the man is in his right mind, and *that* makes them fearful?? They had much more to fear *before* he was healed!

I wonder if sometimes we become so accustomed to dysfunction, that it—the dysfunction--becomes the 'new' normal and we forget what true normalcy is like?! God has re-ordered the disorder in their lives, and they find it threatening.

But the fear goes deeper. They fear the power Jesus had to effect such a transformation. One cannot truly encounter Jesus and remain the same. What might this Jesus do next? What might it cost us? Rather than find out, they ask him to leave.

The newly healed man begs to go with Jesus, to become one of his band of traveling disciples. Jesus says "no". He commands him to become a witness to his own community. "Go tell them what God has done for you." And so, the first missionary to the Gentiles is actually one of their own!

This story began with this question and answer: “What is your name?” “Legion!” It could well end with the same question, Now if the man is asked: “What is your name?” his reply could well be: “New creation”!

Paul tells us: *“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a **new creation**: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become **new!**”* 2 Corinthians 5:17

The problem of evil has been with us since the Garden of Eden. While we live in a scientific age which easily dismisses things that cannot be “proven, what I know for sure is this: Evil is a reality. It is not personified in a red man with horns and a pitchfork. That is a medieval concept. It is however consistently referred to in the scriptures as “satan” which means “adversary” or “against God or Christ”. Evil is real, it is pervasive, it is subtle, it is insidious. What begins as an innocent dalliance, can consume the very life and personality of an individual.

The teenage daughter of friends in Gig Harbor, was groomed by unknown persons online. She was lured to Las Vegas and forced into prostitution. For months they did not know where she was. She was isolated, cut off from family and friends, and forced to do the bidding of her captors. It required the concerted effort of private detectives, law enforcement and prayer to extricate her from that situation.

Was this evil? No question.

Demon possession? I do not know. I do know that she was not herself.

But I also know that God had the power to redeem her and her situation, and as a result, other women were released, set free, and these human traffickers were shut down.

Friends: Christ came to conquer sin and our greatest enemy—death—which he did on the cross. The power and the One within us –is greater that the power of any evil one in the world. (I John 4:1-4)

Healing and salvation can be scary because it means a new way of life, a new reality, a new creation—the old has gone, the past—no matter how broken and flawed, has no more power over us and does not define us! There are some who

prefer the old dysfunctional, self-destructive way of life because change is scary. The cost of healing is high.

As we come to the communion table we are reminded of the costliness of our healing and salvation. It cost Jesus his life. May we be faithful not fearful. May we embrace the new creations God is making of us. May we be reminded of this biblical truth from I John 4:1-4: *⁴You, dear children, are from God and have overcome..evil, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*

Let's pray: Life-giving, all-powerful God: sometimes we chose to cling to self-destructive ways that isolate and separate us from You and from one another. Create in us new hearts and a new willingness to change, under the guidance of your loving Spirit. Hold us close to you and protect us from evil while reminding us that through your victory over sin and death, you are more powerful than our worst enemy. Call us by name, so that we can be transformed into our best selves, reflecting the image of God in Christ's name, Amen.