



Rehumanization

Luke 8:26-39

Grace Waco | 3.17.24

For the last couple of weeks we have been answering this question: how can we be “hearers” and “doers” of the word of God? To be a true follower of Jesus, closer than even his mother and brothers, is to “hear the word of God” and do it, **8:21**. When we are able to really hear Jesus and believe him through action, it shows we are like “good soil” that produces fruit and isn’t “choked” by Satan or the cares of the world.

Last week, Pastor Dave did an incredible job showing us how Jesus' action of calming the storm was a way to reinforce this very principle. Faced with the fear of death, they forgot Jesus' word in **8:22**, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” External circumstances of fear positioned themselves with the opportunity for fear of death to supersede their faith in Jesus' words and promise. But when Jesus calmed the storm, they were able to see more clearly, they had a “fear” of him that was greater than the circumstances.

In our CG this week we talked about what we fear—that “storm” that would cause us to wake Jesus up. But what happens when the fear is not *out there* but *in here*? My confession is that I believe often my greatest fear is fear of self. What happens when what we fear most is not what might happen to us, but what we might do or become? The example I used is a feeling of anxiety that is common to me, about being anxious. Fear of fear, if you will, or anxiety that I will become an anxious person! Another member of our CG described it as “fear of insanity” and another “a fear that when the time comes, I will not have enough faith for the moment.”

You see then how each of these “storms” are questions not of external circumstances, but questions of identity. They are internal. Jesus calls us to love our enemies—but what if that enemy is our very self?

And so Luke puts this story of the calming of the Gerasene demoniac next to the story of Jesus' calming the storm for the sake of our certainty in Jesus, that we would know that he is not only the great calm for external fears but also our internal fears. Or to put it another way—I pray we can walk away today confident that there is no storm of your heart that cannot be calmed by the power of Jesus, no undignified act or thought that cannot be rehumanized. So let's examine today 1) the insanity we carry; 2) the dignity Jesus brings.



The Insanity We Carry

As we've been journeying through the gospel of Luke, it is quite obvious that Jesus has incredible power. We are not even halfway in, and he has already raised a man from the dead, cast out demons, calmed storms, and healed a great sickness from a distance. So when we come to this text and we see this man who had to be, I do not think we are too scared for Jesus. And I do not think that many of us struggle with a fear of demon possession, either.

But demon-possession is real, a sudden and serious overtaking of evil—and there are several explanations as to why we may not see it in our context often today. It is not simply mental illness, although it could include that. I think the most compelling reason we do not see demonic possession as much in our day is because we are so *disenchanted* with spiritual things as a society, Satan does not need to overcome our bodies with spiritual power to trick us. In a culture that is desensitized to spiritual things, a demonic possession could serve as a wake-up call, when Satan would rather let us drowsily waste away ignoring the spiritual realm. This was obviously not the case in Jesus' day—the societies he ministered in were very aware of spiritual presences and forces and so more tempted to doubt God's power when they saw the power of a possessive demonic force. It's also likely that Jesus both sought out these interactions, and that Jesus' physical presence in the world brought out more spiritual forces to the surface, which also seems to happen in the Biblical witness.

If we do not naturally fear the influence of demons, what do we fear? I think it will be helpful to examine this man more in order to relate to him—not as those who are possessed by demons, but as those who in many ways embody the same dehumanizing nature.

What do you picture when you think of the suffering man in this story? Consider how he describes himself as “Legion”, because the demons are many in **verse 30**. As if that doesn't sound like something from a horror movie, think about how he had to be “kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles” in **verse 29**, and that sometimes he broke the bonds. The implication is a man so afflicted with evil that he has been driven further and further from humanity into this rabid beast with wiry, even supernatural strength. Mark's gospel paints this man as cutting or bruising himself with stones (Mark 5:5). In his debased mental state, he has ripped apart his clothes and refuses to be covered like a normal man. He lives, **verse 27**, among the tombs—which in that region would have been large, walk-in caves where bodies were buried. Times where he does break out of his captivity, he is led into the wilderness, translate as “desert” in **verse 29**, the place of desolation, isolation, darkness, and depravity.

Given such a description, I feel as if this picture might convey the content of some of our imaginations?





This is an illustration of the creature Gollum, from Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, that was drawn before any movie or screen adaptations, strictly from the description from the books.

If you remember in that story, Gollum was very much like a hobbit, before his transformation through the evil influence of the ring caused him to descend slowly into madness, isolation, cave-dwelling, nakedness, and self-harm. And there is this moment in *The Fellowship of the Ring* when Frodo is told that Gollum was once very much like him—and cannot believe it.

While Gandalf describes Gollum's story as "sad", Frodo sees it as "loathsome". Instead of compassion, he has only disgust for Gollum. I would venture to say it is not too unlike the members of this Gerasene city, who lock up and chain this man, at first perhaps rightfully for his own good—but eventually this man's identity and humanity are scarred and forgotten. He is no longer human, he is simply "Legion". The real, spiritual forces of evil have so invaded his life in such a superlative way that he seems to the natural eye to be completely lost, given over, beyond rescue.

Sin's trajectory is, by its very nature, dehumanizing. Satan's desire is to make us more demonic than human. But like Frodo's relation to Gollum, you are not so different from the demoniac as you think. In many ways and by many means, you are given over to the process of dehumanization—not by demon possession, which we need not fear in Christ as Jesus' spirit indwells us—but by giving yourself over to the insanity of sin.

Sin is dehumanizing, because it mars the image of God in us meant to reflect God's holiness. This is very much Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 10, where he is encouraging the church to "flee from idolatry". Idolatry is ritual sin—it's giving oneself over to an idol.. It's paganism, false worship,



since what “pagans sacrifice, they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.”

In our passage, this man is led by these demons to uncleanness and lack of holiness. The spirits themselves are called in **verse 29**, “unclean”. So too are the tombs that he lives in. Not only this, but this man is likely a gentile, considering he lives in gentile territory across the sea of Galilee. For this alone he would be unclean. And notice too where the demons beg to go, so for just a while they can escape God’s eternal punishment? Into unclean animals. That word for “drown” which happens to the pigs is actually “choke”. The only other time that word appears in Luke is in the parable of the sower and the seeds—the seed is “choked” by the cares of the world. Satan and his demons are unclean, choked by the world, and their desire is to drag you into uncleanness and choke you in the same way.

Let me be clear here: I am not saying that true insanity, or mental illness, is the same as demon possession, or the result of personal sin. What I *am* saying is that when either you are dead in sin without Christ, or even after receiving Christ you dive headlong into sinful pleasure and desires, when you forget God, when you deny him, and when you sin against others, you are dehumanizing yourself and others. Paul Tripp says that what when we sin we are treating others as “either vehicles to help us get what we want or obstacles in the way of what we want.” You are either living in or calling back to a state of insanity and demonic influence.

What else does Paul mean when he reminds us in Ephesians 2 that in our sin we were: “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air”, or in Romans 1, that if we are in sin, we become “futile in our thinking”, with “darkened hearts”?

Sin is dehumanizing, because it mars the image of God in us meant to reflect God’s holiness. **It’s also dehumanizing because it causes us to doubt, mistrust, or misunderstand the character of God.** When the demonic is confronted by Jesus in **verse 28**, the text says that *he* cries out and falls before him, begging him not to “torture” him. Notice it doesn’t say “they”, that is, the demons, as in **verse 31**, but “he”. This clue shows us that it is this man who is speaking, not the demons. He has an understanding of Jesus’ power and authority, but not of his grace. He knows he is “Son of the most High God”, a name of preeminence. But he imagines in his warped reality that the Son of Almighty God would have no compassion on his evil, demon infested heart and his insane mind.

The townspeople too have a false suspicion of Jesus in **verse 36**, an understanding of his power but not a vision of reality. So they ask him to leave, believing him to be a powerful trouble maker. They care more for the pigs. As my friend pointed out this week, it seems like the deliverance of this human soul was less important to them than the promise of Christmas ham. Why such animosity to Jesus? They don’t have the right imagination of his power. They imagined that the demoniac was beyond saving, so they justified their mistreatment of him and grew a desire for him not to be saved.



So too we can minimize the power of Jesus and dehumanize others by seeing them beyond saving. Think of Jesus' teaching to "love your enemies" in Luke 6. If I imagine that my greatest enemy could become my friend, I would probably want to treat him more as a friend, just in case. And I would desire it more too. But if I believe that my enemy could never become my friend, it wouldn't make sense to treat him as anything else than an enemy, and to learn to desire that he stays that way. Like Jonah, the salvation and grace of God for others can cause us to pout or turn away from Jesus, another kind of insanity.

The Dignity Jesus Brings

The first fascinating thing about Jesus' rehumanizing of the demoniac is that it actually has nothing to do with his repentance, or even his faith, at least on the front end. He asks Jesus *not* to mess with him, whereas in many other stories of healing the one in need seeks Jesus by faith. There appears to be no other reason for Jesus' trip across the sea other than to teach the disciples about faith and fear of God, and to deliver this man from his demons. But what other reason does Jesus need? The soul of one man is worth far more than a tumultuous water crossing. When Jesus sets out to restore dignity, he does so intentionally, often without us asking, as an act of great mercy and compassion, regardless of our state.

Of course, we do see evidence of faith in the demoniac after his healing. In **verse 35** he is clothed, he is in his right mind, and he is "sitting" at the feet of Jesus. Let's look at those in order.

First, he is **clothed**. The Bible, as it were, is more or less a story about nakedness. Adam and Eve are created "naked and unashamed". To be unclothed was a sign of their innocence before God and each other. Shame is falling short of an ideal—but if Adam and Eve are ideal, then they never fall short and therefore need not to clothe themselves to cover up their shortcomings.

If the naked unashamedness Adam and Eve felt was a sign of their perfect world devoid of sin, the nakedness of the demoniac is the opposite. He has no shame not because of his innocence in living up to God's standard, but because of his rejection of God's standard. His nakedness is a sign of his exposed disregard for his sin and affront against God. An example of this in our culture would be the rise of amateur pornography—nakedness is removed of its social and moral stigma not because of innocence to God's holiness, but rejection of God's holiness.

What Jesus does in restoring him is to *clothe* him. It's exactly what God does in the garden when Adam and Eve feel shame for sin—he clothes them through sacrifice. And this is what Jesus does: by freeing this man from Satan's hold, he dignifies him by covering up his shame. This is a restoration of dignity because it is a return to the unashamed state of the garden for which we were created.

Secondly, the man is **in his right mind**. The simplest way to say this is: he began to see reality rightly. When Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden, they were intimate with God and



possessed a kind of wisdom that we won't know until the remaking of the world and our bodies. That wisdom was an openness and understanding to the goodness of God.

Remember that one way sin dehumanizes us is it causes us to doubt God's grace and power, to misunderstand him in a way that draws us away from him, like the townspeople cannot imagine this man being healed, or he himself cannot imagine it. But the healed man in **verse 38**—like the woman forgiven much—he wants to cling to Jesus! Not only that, but he understands Jesus' identity. Jesus tasks him in **verse 29** with “declaring how much *God* has done”, but when he goes, he declares how much *Jesus* had done. He recognizes Jesus' identity not just as a powerful messenger from God, but God himself. This is why he longs to be with Jesus. He is not only saved *from* demons, but saved *to* Jesus.

The mind that has been restored by Jesus is no longer hostile to the things of God, and no longer suspicious of Jesus, but desires more than ever to be with Jesus. This is a restoration of dignity because it is a return to the kind of reality which we created for: to see God rightly and long to be with him.

The last dignity given by Jesus is that the man “sits at his feet”. In Luke we will find this as shorthand for humility before Jesus and a desire to learn. Early disciples of teachers would sit at their feet as they taught. This is the connection with the rest of Luke 8: to “sit at Jesus' feet” is to humbly receive and listen to his word. In this context, it's faith in Jesus. And it's quiet faith—not speaking, but listening. Not raging, but still, like the sea after Jesus' rebukes it.

In the garden, Adam and Eve “walked with God in the cool of the day”, conversing and learning from him. This is what we are created for—to sit in awe at Jesus' feet and learn from him as his disciples. What greater dignity could this man receive! Not only was he freed from his chains and spiritual torment, his shame covered and his mind restored, he was given the right to become a follower of Jesus.

This idea is only confirmed in the last verse of our passage, **verse 39**. At first we may read this as uncompassionate of Jesus. This man wants to stay with him, but Jesus “sends him away.” But we forget the great honor given here. This is Jesus' only recorded visit to this area. It is full of those who have rejected him. This man is his sole witness! What a joyful honor, to not only hear the word at Jesus' feet, but *do* the word, proclaiming throughout the whole city the gospel of Jesus, who came to set the captives free.

Can you picture the demoniac now? No longer is his name “legion”. No longer is he exposed in shame. No longer is he bound in chains to the insanity of sin. No longer is he unclean and outcast from the city, hostile and blind to God. No longer does he wander in the wilderness. No longer does he live in the tombs.

Can you picture how you were before Jesus? Twisted, dark, and headed for worse? Now picture yourself, trusting in Christ, sitting as his feet—still, clothed, in your right mind. When the unclean



demons went into the unclean pigs and were hurled off the “steep bank” of the cliff and drowned in the chaotic waters, it was a picture of how your great transformation could take place.

That word for “steep bank” is the same for “precipice” in Luke 4:29, what the crowds in Nazareth wanted to throw Jesus off of. That wasn’t his time to die, but it is coming. In less than two weeks, we will mark together how In his death, Jesus went off the precipice. He became unclean by taking our uncleanliness on. He was hurtled down into the sea, descending into the chaos of death and hell.

In a Roman Crucifixion, the crucified died by a form of drowning, not on water, but in their own blood. As Jesus hung on the cross, the weight of His body pulled down on the diaphragm and the air moved into the lungs and remained there. He was only able to exhale by mustering the painful energy to raise himself up on his nailed feet. The difficulty surrounding exhalation leads to a slow form of suffocation. The seed of God fell into the ground and was choked.

Paul says Jesus “became” sin, that is, he became insanity. He was not possessed by demons, but he took every demonic temptation on himself. Dying, he went to live in the tombs, the place of the dead.

And rising—he sealed the fate of every demonic power in the universe, and every enemy—even the enemy of yourself. Rising, the world became still again, anticipating that great stillness and peace when he comes in glory and Satan and his demons are not thrown into pigs but into the abyss. Rising, he clothed you in his life that one day will so cover you that shame will forever be no more. Rising, he changed the minds and hearts of his people back to God. Rising, he welcomed us to sit at his feet.

In Revelation 12 it says we will ultimately overcome Satan by “the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony”. The former demoniac is now commissioned by Jesus to overcome Satan and his demons. It seems likely that the former demoniac would rarely make the mistake of considering someone too far from God's grace. Its far more unlikely that he would value pigs over souls when his soul was so violently rescued. It's the reason why Jesus sees him as the perfect evangelist and leaves him as the only disciple in his town. Forgiven much, loved much. And yet it could be true of all of us, since Ephesians tells us "at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord".

All of us in Christ have such a testimony. All of us in Christ once belonged to the kingdom of darkness. But no longer. If God can save a man from a legion of demons, he can save even your greatest enemy—yourself—and so he can save anyone, and he can calm any storm, inside or out.

