

LEGION: A New Proclamation
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Loving Jesus Sermon Series

In this series we have called LOVING JESUS . . . we've been taking a look at some of the sweetest stories in the Gospel of Luke . . . of people who have encountered the person of Jesus Christ.

So far . . . elderly **Simeon** and then **Anna** in the Jerusalem Temple

A **leper** who had been isolated from any sense of community other than broken community

And a **paralyzed** man who at least had the incredible resource of his FRIENDS . . . who dug a deep hole in order to get him to Jesus.

This morning's story... we find in Luke chapter 8 . . . and as you're getting to Luke 8 in your Bibles . . . BTW if you are using a pew Bible, you'll find this story on page 1028 . . .

. . . . let me ask you this . . .

You remember the last time when you were in a place . . . or with other people . . . and you felt so out of place that you couldn't wait to get out of there!?

Could be **something somewhat simple** . . . like for me . . . CAMPING!
Get me to the Hampton Inn so I can actually **sleep**

Or maybe in a **city or a country** where you felt so out of place . . . and terribly uncomfortable. I'm not going to tell you about those cities for me because you might think those cities are the GREATEST places ANYwhere!

Or maybe it was a **group of people** that were so very different from you that your sense of awkward was almost **PAINFUL** for you.

It may have been a different of **language** . . . or **culture** . . . or maybe even differing **morals and values**.

Well, the disciples of Jesus probably felt just like you and I often do!

The bumper for them is that the teacher they were following was just the opposite. When you read the Gospel stories in the New Testament of the Bible, you can see that Jesus is like a MAGNET to those uncomfortable situations and to those people that oftentimes make US really uncomfortable.

And Jesus does it again in our story for this morning: Luke 8

Jesus and his disciples HAD been in the area of Capernaum on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee the Sea of Galilee is more like a large lake that it is when we think of a SEA and some called it the Lake of Geneseret. It might surprise you that Oklahoma's Grand Lake is actually a bit larger . . . just more fingery in its shape . . . than the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is more clearly egg shaped and only covers an area of about 64 square miles. And it's the lowest altitude freshwater lake in the world!

Well, Jesus and his closest disciples get into their boat on the NW shore and head across the lake to the southeast. And along the way, one of the famous Sea of Galilee windstorms came sweeping across the lake. . . . These storms weren't uncommon, but they must have been pretty intimidating . . . like when LIGHTENING in Oklahoma strikes a bit TOO CLOSE TO YOUR HOUSE So, while they were crossing the lake, this sudden storm comes along and freaks out the disciples while Jesus is taking a nap in the back of the boat. SO, the disciples wake up Jesus JESUS, we're about to die here while you're taking a nap And Jesus gets up and speaks to the wind to pipe down. . . and sure enough, the lake goes still again. Wouldn't that be great on Oklahoma lakes in the springtime!!?!?!?!?!?

With that we come to OUR story I know our tradition is to read this Scripture together out loud . . . for this morning . . . I want to invite you to follow along in the story as I read it . . . and talk it through as we go along.

Verse 26

26 Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

And BTW, by *opposite Galilee*, Luke isn't just talking geographically, like "just right there across the lake."

Luke is also saying OPPOSITE GALILEE . . . as in 'we're not in Kansas anymore.' For good Jewish people, Geresae is not where you are going for a relaxing weekend getaway or to visit grandma. The Gerasenes were not Jewish . . .

they aren't looking for Messiah . . . and they don't follow all the rules like good Jews are suppose to. . . and they didn't have the same moral and ethical standards that the Jews had!

And the disciples are about to find that out first hand!

Now keep in mind - the disciples are still recovering from what the heck happened out there on the lake a hour or two ago!

Verse 27

²⁷ When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.

Now . . . soak this into your imagination . . . as they landed on shore and stepped out of the boat . . . this frenzied BUCK-naked guy comes running out of the graveyard . . . the epitome of “**death warmed over**” . . . sprinting toward Jesus and his still weak-kneed stunned disciples.

A couple of verses later, Luke tells us that this guy HAD been kept chained up under guard. . . . but even guards couldn't contain him because he'd break out of the chains and shackles **they** attached to him.

And when Mark tells the story in his Gospel, he adds that this guy would cut himself with stones and would *cry out day and night from among the tombs and through the hills*. Now these people didn't have **insulated windows and doors with air conditioning to block out the outside noise**. Can you even imagine trying to sleep at night with this guy's ranting and raving in your neighborhood **all night long**?

Well Luke continues . . . check out verse 28

²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.”

Now . . . just a bit ago – out on the lake - Jesus' own disciple asked themselves, ***Who is this man . . . that he can tell the wind to stop and it stops*** . . .

but this demon possessed non-Jewish man from across the lake knew EXACTLY who Jesus was!

Now, for sure THIS MAN wouldn't know to recognize Jesus so let's be clear . . . those demons inside of him certainly did recognize . . .

You might remember in his letter later in the New Testament, James the half-brother of Jesus wrote this: **Show me** *faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe there is one God. Good (for you! But . . .) even the demons believe that – and shudder!* (James 2:18-19)

Well, we sure recognize that reality from our story . . . *Even the demons believe . . . and shudder!*

And through the man's voice, these demons shouted **JESUS, SON OF THE MOST HIGH GOD, I beg you, don't torment me!**

PAUSE

As we come to verse 29, we see that this wasn't a **short** sweet episode, lasting just a couple of minutes. Look how Luke describes it . . .

29 For **JESUS had** commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. . . .

The way Luke tells it, it sounds like this took a while . . . like a knock down dragged out heavy weight battle going on here. Maybe like Elijah and the gods of Baal story from the OT.

(1 Kings 18)

Verse 30

30 **Jesus** then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him.

LEGION . . . now there's a name. Not something you're going to name your next child.

Does it help to understand how terrible this encounter is, when you know that a Legion of soldiers was **6,000 warriors** ?

But, wait a second here . . . for the second time, these demons **BEGGED** Jesus - -- remember, they knew who Jesus was . . . they had already recognized Him as the ***Son of the Most High God***. They recognized Him as the very one who created them in the first place . . . before they ever aligned themselves with Lucifer in rebellion against God centuries or millennia before.

Verse 31

³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.

. . . the deep bottomless pit under the earth.

Now this is one of my many “I wonder why”s in the Gospel stories!

I wonder why didn't Jesus go ahead right there and throw these demons into the abyss of destruction. Why didn't Jesus get rid of them at THAT MOMENT?

And the only explanation I know is how Jesus explains several other of my “I wonders” - - - - ***IT'S NOT TIME YET!***

Like his first disciples, I'm like ***Are we there yet? Is it time yet?***

And His reply is same as last time I asked: ***“NOPE ---- IT'S NOT TIME YET!”***

Verse 32

³² Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him (THIRD TIME) to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

Mark's rendition of this story is that this LEGION of demons took over a herd of **2000** pigs.

And you might remember that to JEWS , pigs were incredibly NASTY animals. A Jew would NEVER eat a pig. . . . not EVEN BACON! (Can you imagine . . . not EVEN BACON!) A Jew isn't even going to touch a pig much less go anywhere near a **herd** of 2000 pigs.

Jesus' disciples are so amazingly grossed out at what they seeing right now --- and so Luke's not even talking about the DISCIPLES because they are probably pushing down their gag reflux with their heads between their knees AT THE SITE of 2000 pigs.

And . . . of course . . . the **Gerasene pig herders** are stunned by what **they're** seeing.

They're seeing their livelihood . . . their \$\$\$ dollars signs literally drowning in the lake!

And so verse 32

34 When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. **35** Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, **and they were afraid.** **36** And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. **37** Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear.

No DUH! Their **economy** can't handle Jesus . . . although they are bound to be pleased that this man was delivered and restored . . . and they'll be able to sleep at night again without all the screaming from the cemetery . . . if Jesus stayed around, drowning pigs . . . they can't AFFORD for Jesus to stay with them.

And finally, the end of the story . . .

Verse 38 As Jesus was getting back in the boat

38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, **39** "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And [the man] went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

That's odd isn't it!? We are so use to Jesus' invitation to "**FOLLOW ME**" . . . but when this man wanted to GO WITH JESUS, Jesus sent him away.

Jesus instructed the man that HIS CALLING was now with his OWN PEOPLE . . . his OWN TRIBE

And HIS STORY also becomes OUR STORY: *Return home and tell how much God has done for you.*


Hold up your Bible: **Friends this is the WORD of God for the PEOPLE of God!**

I want to suggest three takeaways from this Gospel story . . . the first two, I'll quickly throw at you and then spend a bit more time on the third:

First . . .

Let's acknowledge the **reality of DEMONISM**

The Bible describes for us that there is a spirit world (so to speak) that we mostly can't see, but the evidence is around us continuously.

Our Scriptures describe . . . mostly in sporadic and somewhat vague ways . . . an ongoing battle between the God who created us, the God we worship . . .  . . . and a great enemy who has long set himself against God.

The Bible refers to this enemy, first as a serpent . . . later calls him the devil and names him Satan, Lucifer, Baalzabub and other titles.

And the back story seems to be --- from Isaiah and others --- that at some point in created history . . . Lucifer was an arch angel of God, alongside Michael the archangel . . . yet Lucifer set himself against God and took a third of the angels with him in his rebellion . . . therefore starting a spiritual warfare that is often referred to in the Bible.

C.S. Lewis wrote of two extremes that are common among Christians when it comes to the devil and demonism.

On one extreme is **disbelief** - the foolishness of ignoring the reality of the spirit world, the devil and demonism. . .

. . . and the other extreme being **obsessive** . . . paying TOO MUCH attention to the devil and the underworld so that it become unhealthy and distractive in discipleship.

I personally find in my own life and walk with the Lord to . .

. . . acknowledge the **REALITY** of Satan and his forces . . .

. . . to acknowledge their **ACTIVITY** . . .

. . . and to **SET MYSELF AGAINST THEM** in a protective away by the blood of Jesus and walking close in obedience with Jesus.

You see . . . As sons and daughters of God through Jesus Christ, we have no reason to be afraid of. . .

. . . or to be victimized . . . or intimidated by demons.

You'll remember the Apostle John declares what is our reality when he writes: **Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.** (1 Jn 4:4)

The Jesus we follow has authority and power over ALL creation, including the spiritual underworld!

And so **takeaway #2** is simply this:

Rather than being either ignorant or apathetic . . . or being freaked out by the reality of demonism and the underworld, **BE FAITHFUL AND ATTENTIVE IN FOLLOWING JESUS.**

The author of Hebrews instructs us to **Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.** (Hebrews 12:2)

And the Apostle Paul instructed: **Walk in the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.** (Galatians 5:16)

The takeaway I want to spend a bit more focus on is this third one – Jesus said to the now-whole man:

Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.

I gotta admit that right now, I wish we were in a classroom or a living room or sitting across a table so that we could share our stories together . . . **how much God has done for you!**

I would want to hear your story . . . and I would want you to know mine.

I would tell you about 50 years ago . . . this very weekend . . . May 15 and 16 . . . as a young teenage boy, I had a personal encounter with my Savior Jesus Christ that changed the trajectory of my life.

I would tell you about how three years later, as a U.S. Air Force family, we made a move internationally that brought a season of God's redirection and faithbuilding in my life.

And two years after that, when the Lord opened doors for me to come to Tulsa to be a student at ORU where God refined me and showed me what it means to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ and to live an empowered Christian life.

Before I left ORU, God laid before me an opportunity to be a part of the youth ministry at Asbury Church where the Lord charted a path of discipleship that surprised me because I was planning on going another direction.

I can tell you about God's healing in my life

About God's provision in my life

And about God's astounding faithfulness in the midst of MY life's great challenges.

Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you

Friends, we oftentimes find ourselves wanting great adventures OUT THERE somewhere, when most often God is charting a course of adventure of **following Jesus** in our everyday ordinary living.

PAUSE PAUSE

You've probably heard this yourself Because of Asbury's broad INTERNATIONAL outreach program, it's not uncommon for us to hear: **Why do we go to the other side of the world to do missions when the needs are so great right here in Tulsa?**

Friends whether we GO FAR or STAY NEAR isn't simply an either/or question . . . it is a both/and! As a church, we go FAR AND we stay NEAR!

We are thrilled that in our beloved Asbury, the Lord has called us and given us the resources to honor God's instruction to BOTH:

. . . GO to the NATIONS . . . and love your own NEIGHBOR!

And we can find that story and influence of Asbury for Jesus Christ in . . . BOTH faraway lands AND with our own Tulsa area neighbors!

Hear this dear ones: Whether you GO . . . or whether you STAY, we are always responding to the call of Jesus to **TELL OTHERS ABOUT WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR US!**

Like that man once filled with a Legion of demons . . . Jesus has changed our lives . . . and His deep desire is that ALL would come to know Him and follow Him.

To the now freed Gerasene man, Jesus didn't simply tell him to take his changed life, go to his house and keep quiet. . . .

Jesus said, *Return to your home . . .*

Stay with your people, your tribe, your community,
your neighbors . . .

and declare how much God has done for you.

So . . . WHAT IS YOUR STORY? What is it that Jesus has done in your life?

Cleansed your "leprosy" ?

Healed your "paralysis" ?

Delivered you from your "demons" ?

Forgiven you of your sin?

Given you assurance and identity and purpose?

Friends . . . **tell your story** to those around you.

You don't **HAVE** to PREACH to them, unless you want to.

But you can tell them your story! It's yours to tell.

PAUSE

Maybe you've haven't yet GIVEN YOUR OWN LIFE TO JESUS

Maybe you've never made the decision to acknowledge Jesus as LORD AND SAVIOR

Friend . . . I want to let you know that Jesus invites you to FOLLOW HIM . . . to walk in His ways and to see life from a whole new vantage point than you've ever seen it before.

If you haven't yet declared IN YOUR OWN LIFE that Jesus Christ is Lord and it's your intention to become a follower of His today, I want to invite you to MAKE THAT DECISION . . . and BEGIN that adventure TODAY . . .

Just I did one May weekend as a young man

Pastor JOHN or I would LOVE to come alongside of you in that choice and I want to invite you to come **visit with us in just a bit when we come to the Service of Holy Communion.**

To some . . . Jesus says **COME**

To some Jesus says **GO**

To some Jesus says **STAY**

To ALL Jesus says . . . **TELL THEM !**

Because ultimately the call of ALL FOLLOWERS of Jesus is to

HELP OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS!