

## It Doesn't Have to Be This Way

**Text: Luke 8:26-39**

Luke 8:26-39 – “**Jesus’ 10 Commandments**” by Leonard Sweet

The noted author, John Killinger, tells a powerful story about a man who is all-alone in a hotel room in Canada. The man is in a state of deep depression. He is so depressed that he can't even bring himself to go downstairs to the restaurant to eat.

He is a powerful man usually the chairman of a large shipping company but at this moment, he is absolutely overwhelmed by the pressures and demands of life... and he lies there on a lonely hotel bed far from home wallowing in self-pity.

All of his life, he has been fastidious, worrying about everything, anxious and fretful, always fussing and stewing over every detail. And now, at mid-life, his anxiety has gotten the best of him, even to the extent that it is difficult for him to sleep and to eat.

He worries and broods and agonizes about everything, his business, his investments, his decisions, his family, his health, even, his dogs. Then, on this day in this Canadian hotel, he craters. He hits bottom. Filled with anxiety, completely immobilized, paralyzed by his emotional despair, unable to leave his room, lying on his bed, he moans out loud: “Life isn't worth living this way, I wish I were dead!”

And then, he wonders, what God would think if he heard him talking this way. Speaking aloud again he says, “God, it's a joke, isn't it? Life is nothing but a joke.” Suddenly, it occurs to the man that this is the first time he's talked to God since he was a little boy. He is silent for a moment and then he begins to pray. He describes it like this: “I just talked out loud about what a mess my life was in and how tired I was and how much I wanted things to be different in my life. And you know what happened next? A voice!! I heard a voice say, ‘It doesn't have to be that way!’ That's all.”

He went home and talked to his wife about what happened. He talked to his brother who is a minister and asked him: “Do you think it was God speaking to me?” The brother said: “Of course, because that is the message of God to you and everyone of us. That's the message of the Bible. That's why Jesus Christ came into the world to save us, to deliver us, to free us, to change us and to show us that ‘It doesn't have to be that way.’ A few days later, the man called his brother and said, “You were right. It has really happened. I've done it. I've had a rebirth. I'm a new man. Christ has turned it around for me.”

Well, the man is still prone to anxiety. He still has to work hard. But, now he has a source of strength. During the week, he often leaves his work-desk and goes to the church near his office. He sits there and prays. He says: "It clears my head. It reminds me of who I am and whose I am. Each time as I sit there in the Sanctuary, I think back to that day in that hotel room in Canada and how depressed and lonely and lost I felt and I hear that voice saying: It doesn't have to be that way."

That is precisely what this story is all about. Christ walks into the tormented life of the Gerasene demoniac, this madman, whose life is coming apart at the seams and He turns it around for him. He gives him a new beginning, a new start, a new birth. At the beginning of the narrative, it sounds like a horror-story. This wild-eyed, adrenalin-filled, madman comes running and shrieking out of the tomb. He is so unbalanced! He is convinced that he is being held captive by a whole legion of demons, who are pulling and jerking him in every direction.

This is an eerie, grim, suspenseful, frightening situation. Jesus and His disciples have just come through a storm on the Sea of Galilee. It is nighttime and having survived that frightening storm they are thrilled to now set foot on solid ground. But, as they get out of the boat, they encounter a different kind of storm... yet another scary experience. They hear strange sounds coming from the tombs... shrieks, growls, screams, moans, the rattling of chains. Then, suddenly, a horrifying sight. A madman with tattered clothes, bruised, dirty, bloody and battered with pieces of chains dangling from his arms and ankles, comes running and screaming directly toward them!

Now, let me ask you something: "What would you have done in that situation?" This was a perilous place, a bloodcurdling moment... a powerful, dangerous, berserk man, charging them. I think I would have run for my life... or jumped back in the boat.

But not Jesus! Jesus stood His ground and faced the madman. Undaunted, unafraid... Jesus stood there and dealt with this wild man. Jesus healed him. He brought peace to his troubled soul. He changed him. He cleansed him. He turned his life around... and you know (don't you?) that He can do that for you.

**Now, let me underscore this and spell it out a bit more by lifting three ideas out of this great story...**

- 1. You Don't Have to Be at War with Yourself.**
- 2. You Don't Have to Be at War with Other People.**
- 3. You Don't Have to Be at War with God.**

[Members: Please see Luke 8 the sermon titled "Jesus' 10 Commandments" by Leonard Sweet]

From Mary Shelly's "Frankenstein" to The Nightmare on Elm Street's "Freddy;" from Friday the Thirteenth's "Jason" to Stephanie Meier's vampire "Voltaire", we are always creating new monsters. Why are we constantly on the lookout for bigger, scarier "bumps in the night?" Why do we keep making up monsters that are so elaborate and extraordinary, so super-powered and immortal?

Maybe we need our monsters to be as unlike ourselves as possible so that we can ignore the presence of the real monsters that possess us . . . from the inside out.

Demonology isn't something we talk about much less study anymore. But we can't escape talking about demon possession after reading a text like today's gospel lesson.

The "Geresene demoniac" is a classic "monster." He is nothing like the "normal" people in his community. He runs around naked. He is "out of his mind." He is strong enough to break out of any chains and shackles. He can escape from any prison that his neighbors build to contain him. He lives in the graveyard. He spends his life ranting and raving among the tombs, living with the dead.

Yet he is NOT a monster. He is just a man. A man possessed by a "legion" of demons, but a human being nonetheless. Once Jesus calls out the unclean spirits from him, the man is restored physically and spiritually to his full humanity. Having been healed by Jesus the man joyfully proclaims "how much Jesus had done for him" to all his neighbors, even "throughout the city."

This is someone who was never "a monster." But he had been a man possessed.

Think "demon possession" is a relic of a pre-scientific age when mental and physical illnesses were attributed to evil spirits? The fact is we live in a culture that suffers from a "legion" of possessing spirits, as toxic and traumatic as those that came raging forth from the Geresene demoniac.

The spew from one of our most destructive demons is even now washing up in greasy globs all along the coastlines in the Gulf of Mexico.

We are possessed by a life style lubricated by more and more oil. We will do anything to keep the grease coming.

We are possessed by a greed that puts profits before protecting people and the planet.

We are possessed by an insatiable desire for "more stuff" — and the cost of that "stuff" is increasingly deadly.

When Jesus banished the evil spirits from the Gerasene demoniac, he filled the man

with a new identity and a new mission...

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### Regardless of the Cost?

I recently came across an excellent illustration that manifests the difference between intellectual faith and genuine faith. In the late 1890's, a famous tightrope walker strung a wire across Niagara Falls. As 10,000 people watched, he inched his way along the wire from one side of the falls to the other.

When he got to the other side, the crowd cheered wildly. Finally, the tightrope walker was able to quiet the crowd and shouted to them, 'Do you believe in me?'. The crowd shouted back, 'We believe! We believe!'.

Again he quieted the crowd and shouted to them, 'I'm going back across the tightrope but this time I'm going to carry someone on my back. Do you believe I can do that?'. The crowd yelled back, 'We believe! We believe!'. He quieted the crowd one more time and then asked them, 'Who will be that person?'.

The crowd suddenly became silent. Not a single person was willing to apply the very truth that they professed to believe in--that the tightrope walker could cross the falls with a person on his back.

We may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but does our faith surpass the faith of demons? Are we willing trust our lives with Jesus? Are we willing to follow Him regardless of the cost?

Bryn MacPhail, Surpassing the Faith of Demons

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### Return Home and Tell How Much God Has Done for You

As Ted Peters once pointed out, in the English language, it's curious that the word evil is "live" spelled backwards. And indeed, evil always destroys. Life is diminished if not wiped out where the demons rule. The death of the pigs reflects that. What's more, in the Ancient Near East, the sea represented one of the forces of chaos that people feared. So it's a double-whammy: first there is death but second there is death by drowning in the sea, thus piling up and compounding the sense of chaos and evil in this story.

But the sad spectacle of those hapless pigs rushing headlong into the sea also reminds us that the expelling of evil from our world always involves sacrifice. For whatever the reason, God does not simply wave a magic wand to eliminate evil. Rooting out evil takes time, takes effort, and takes above all sacrifice. This should

hardly come as any surprise, however, to people who live their lives in the shadow of a cross.

One final point, however: Jesus was chased away by the townsfolk but the healed man remained and according to verse 39, he kept on talking about what Jesus had done. Something about his ongoing witness reminds us that this is also our role: lots of people in this world try to chase Jesus away. Our task is to hang around anyway and to just keep talking, just keep witnessing to Jesus' work, and just keep hoping that at the end of the day, that witness will bring people back to the very Jesus they once chased away. "Return home and tell how much God has done for you," Jesus told this man.

He tells the rest of us the exact same thing.

Scott Hoeszee, Comments and Observations

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### Speaking to Our Day

Does the story of the Gerasene demoniac speak to OUR day as it did its own? Absolutely! To the church which battles the demons of social evil, the message is there is hope in Jesus. To individuals for whom there is an everyday battle ongoing with the demon of depression, the message is there is hope in Jesus. To those who battle the demon of fear, the message is there is hope in Jesus. Those who fight the demon of addiction, the message is there is hope in Jesus. And to those who have so many battles going on against so many demons that their name is LEGION, the message is there is hope in Jesus.

David E. Leininger, Collected Sermons, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com)

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### What Have You to Do with Me?

"What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God?" the demented man cries out. Again we have a standard question in the demonology of the time. In the Gospels the demons are pictured as being scared stiff of the power of Jesus Christ. They try to get away from Him as fast as they can! This may sound quaint to us, but I would suggest this morning that in a deeper sense it is a question that has been put to Jesus by individuals and societies again and again. "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" "Leave us alone. Mind your own business. Keep your hands off my life." "What have you to do with me?" the demented man asked. The answer is that Jesus has everything to do with him. Jesus had come to cure him and restore him to his right mind. He has authority over even the demonic: "Come out of him, you unclean spirit!" (Mark 5 v.8) He says. And it is done. Just so Jesus has cast

unclean spirits out of men and women down through the ages - spirits of greed, lust, hypocrisy, aggression. That is not theory, it is history.

Donald B. Strobe, Collected Works, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com)

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### Luther's Demons

Martin Luther, believed in demons but he believed in God more. In that great Hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" he writes:

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:  
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.

That hymn, first published in 1529, has been called "the greatest hymn of the greatest man of the greatest period of German history." It has also been dubbed the "Battle Hymn of the Reformation" and with good reason. The Reformation touched off one of the most influential movements in world history. But before this famous Battle Hymn could be written Luther had to battle his personal demons and exorcize them from his own life. Luther felt utterly worthless and incapable of carrying the burdens of priesthood. On occasion Luther even flogged himself in an attempt to keep himself from sin.

He was often, he felt, pursued and tormented by Satan and his cohorts. Until one day, while reading Paul's letter to the Romans, he suddenly understood the meaning of God's grace and how it is appropriated by faith. In that moment he came to understand that he was justified before God through faith and not by his works.

You might say that after this experience Luther was no longer possessed by his demons, he was sitting upright, dressed, and in his right mind.

Brett Blair, [www.eSermons.com](http://www.eSermons.com).

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### Legion

When Jesus asked the man his name, he answered, "Legion." A Roman legion was a regiment of 6,000 soldiers. Doubtless this man had seen a Roman legion on the march, and his poor, afflicted mind felt that there was not one demon but a whole regiment inside him. It may well be that the word haunted him because he had seen atrocities carried out by a Roman legion when he was a child.

William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975, p.

### When Jesus Comes To Town

In a recent lecture the popular author, Christopher Lasch, wonders about the lack of morality and human values in our society. Many liberals today, says Lasch, see public life as an amoral struggle for profit and power and relegate morality to the shadowy realm of private choice and "lifestyles." What we need, says Lasch, is a new sense of fraternalism, a new sense of brotherhood that is neither self-righteous nor exploitative. To bring more peace and wholeness we need to cast out the demons of greed and exploitation and indifference.

When Jesus comes into an area, he not only casts out demons, he changes the economy because he changes people, their goals and values. When Paul preached Christ's gospel in ancient Ephesus, the silversmiths and others, who made religious souvenirs and idols of the goddess, Diana, knew their economy was in trouble if Jesus' religion flourished.

John Newton, author of "Amazing Grace," finally stopped his slave trading when Jesus really got hold of his life. Charles Colson, Richard Nixon's hatchet man, was converted and now devotes his life to prison reform. What would happen to our frenetic age of greed if Jesus really got hold of us drove out our demons.

Maurice A. Fetty, The Divine Advocacy, CSS Publishing Company.

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### Is It A Devil or a Disease?

In polite society we have not wanted to talk much of demons and the demonic. In our liberal, educated culture, we have believed that sin was due mostly to ignorance and that evil could be eradicated by education. In our psychologically enlightened times we have avoided the more ancient religious and mythological language of devils and evil. We have instead preferred words like repression, impulses, sublimation, drives, complexes, phobias, regression, neuroses, psychoses, manic-depressive, schizophrenic and schizoid -- to name a few.

If we have been suspicious of religious healers and exorcists and spiritual counselors, we have been implicitly trustful of psychiatrists, psychologists, psychoanalysts, counselors and therapy groups. If we have been doubtful of prayer, meditation and conversion, we have been trustful of amphetamines, barbiturates and tranquilizers, not to mention alcohol, cocaine, and marijuana. If in our time witch doctors have disappeared, strangely enough witches have reappeared by the thousands. Even exorcists are making a small comeback after considerable media exposure and hype.

Whether demons and the demonic are widely acknowledged in our time may be debated, but that they were common in Jesus' time we can have no doubt. In his time, when most illness was attributable to sin, it was but a short step to attribute all mental illness or epilepsy to demonic powers actually residing in the person and controlling him or her. Thus to cure a person of seizures or dementia or schizophrenia or melancholia, the healer had to have power not only to name the demon, but power to cast him out, to throw him out of the person's life.

Maurice A. Fetty, *The Divine Advocacy*, CSS Publishing Company.

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### My Real Problem Is That I Don't Like Myself

Some time ago, a young lawyer came to see his pastor. He was down in the dumps, at his wit's end. He said: "Everything's gone wrong. I have lost confidence in my professional ability... my wife has left me. I can't get along with my children. I'm cut off from my parents and my in-laws. I'm having conflicts with my co-workers. I've been drinking heavily. Everybody has left me... and I don't blame them. I've been bitter and hostile. I've done so many mean and cruel things... and now I have so many problems (and then he literally said this).... "My troubles are Legion!"

He paused and took a deep breath. Then, he leaned forward and said: "To tell you the truth..."

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