

Proper 7C
St. Luke 8:26-39
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St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Slay the Dragon Demon!

*"Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. A 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.** When 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."*

God even showed mercy upon the demons, *undeserving* as they were. In the process of healing and saving the man plagued by demons in his mind, he gives them a chance. Jesus allows them to leave and enter into the heard of swine, instead of immediately condemning them to the abyss. Are you really surprised the swineherds were upset after they lost their herd of swine? It is not surprising to me that they sent Jesus packing, *never mind* the fear inspired by the event!

Don't believe in the devil and his demons? What are the demons we believe in today? And, how do they plague us?

There are demons living in some people that motivate them to act out in unimaginable and inconceivable acts of pure evil. **Evidence the shooter** in Orlando this past weekend, who, acting out of pure evil, rendered 50 innocent and helpless people to a horrible death.

...What demons do you suppose still wander out there in the world because of our inconceivable and unimaginable unwillingness to take any action to prevent this from happening again? Who must be celebrating as we wring our hands and deny responsibility for our violent culture and our unwillingness to act or change? Follow the money to find who is benefiting from this demonic carnage!

And what would Jesus say about this? In the face of a demonic and brutal political system he called on His followers to be peacemakers and lovers and to not live by the sword unless they wanted to die by the sword. Jesus inspired courage and strong faith that led His followers to lay down their lives for love as He did Himself.

So Jesus faced many demons in his ministry: brutal conquerors and politicians; conniving religious leaders who felt threatened by his words and teachings; real demons that plagued real people who needed to be healed like the Geresene Demoniac in today's Gospel passage; and inner demons, like the ones that tempted Jesus as he wandered in the wilderness.

What are inner demons? How do they plague us?

Some of the demons, which are out there and are very real, are more common than you might imagine. You may even have one living in you.

These demons are parts of our past that can take on a life of their own. They are things which we should have let go of a long time ago, but we hold onto them until they begin to define us as people. And these demons can control our lives!

Inner demons are often created by self-doubts and self-recrimination. If you exposed the ones causing self-recrimination, the world might laugh at the ridiculousness. For example, imagine the poor woman who thought of herself for a lifetime as bad and dishonest because of a memory of stealing candy hidden in one of the kitchen cabinets by her parents. Or the poor man who told a lie when he was a young man trying to protect one of his friends. These demons, once seeded in our memories, tend to grow and claim us as a victim by defining us as bad and dishonest. And then our negative feelings become so strong that we either become what we fear we are, surrendering to the inner demon, or the guilt from them grows to paralyze us from being the people God called or created us to be. Guilt is a very powerful and self-destructing demon, that if it goes untreated, will eat away at you like cancer.

But guilt is not the only inner demon that needs healing. There is our friend anger, another one that often is harbored like *our most favorite possession* until it grows into an ugly monster that defines us as a person. *"Chris is such an angry person! Every word out of his mouth is a criticism. Why is he so angry about everything? What is he so angry about?"*

Have you ever known someone defined by their anger? I almost allowed mine to eat me up like a cancer. My complaints of angry victimhood got old fast, and people got tired of hearing them. I watched as certain situations and people triggered my anger. And then I knew radical treatment and eventually surgery were in order. I used the radiation of prayer to root out my anger and the chemo-therapy of conscience to slay the *victim* in me and claim my responsibility for what had caused my own anger. And once treated, this demon no longer plagued my life and was cast out of my spirit. Treating these cancerous demons that want to

cause decay in our souls is not easy, but you are not alone in this pursuit: you have a loving and healing God who is willing to touch and heal the wounds of the past. You have a community of fellow sinners, who when they are open and honest with themselves and with you, have much wisdom to share in the process of seeking healing and the cleansing of such demons from the past. That community is known as the church.

And then there is the inner demon of self-doubt. This one is insidious and the seed of this demon often goes back years into our childhood. This demon prevents us from having any real hope, stopping us from believing in ourselves and really believing in God. Self-doubt leads us to not choose, thinking that if we do choose, it will be too great a risk of failure. But by not choosing, our life becomes a failure. When our existence is plagued by this demon, all seems hopeless.

Enter Jesus, healing the sick who seem beyond all hope. With faith in God, we are able to overcome any demon and choose life instead.

I will refrain from calling illness a demon, even though some illnesses make us believe there is something demonic about them. Medicine still has no cure for illnesses of the mind, only medications to treat its symptoms and hopefully control them for a time. But prayer and faith are also a part of coping with mental illness and healing the brokenness that accompanies it. Even here, prayer and faith bring hope to those who seem beyond it. I know, I have seen it at work.

God's presence can send the demons packing, or at least diminish their power over us and the damage they desire to do. Whether the demons that plague the Geresene demoniac were minions of satan or what modern doctors would call mental illness doesn't much matter, so much as the knowledge that with God,

overcoming demons is possible and that there is great hope for us. AMEN.