### “Living in the Tombs” Steve Finlan for The First Church, June 22, 2025

**Luke 8:26–39**

26 They arrived in Gerasa, opposite Galilee. 27 As he stepped out on shore, a man from the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had not worn any clothes, and did not live in a house but in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down, shouting, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me,” 29 for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (Many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles . . .) 30Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. . . 32 Now there on the hill a herd of swine was feeding, and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. He allowed it. 33 Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd stampeded down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

34 When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 35 People came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. They became frightened. . . 37and asked Jesus to leave, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and left. . . 39“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.”

Have you ever known someone—or have you *been* someone—whose entire life has been turned around? Here we have a case of a man possessed and harassed by demons, dwelling in tombs, wailing, confused, and dangerous to others, who is finally delivered of these spirits by Jesus’ hand, and then returned to his right mind. What a sudden and astounding reversal!

I don’t know if it’s that sudden miraculous reversal that creates fear in the townspeople, but the story becomes quite humorous at this point. Possibly they are afraid of losing more swine to demons. In any case, the frightened folks ask Jesus to leave, so he does.

Of course, the Gerasenes are Gentiles who know next to nothing about God, but here they see a remarkable demonstration of God’s power. When Jesus leaves, he tells the cured man to stay behind and tell people his story.

It’s as though Jesus left an evangelist behind in this Gentile region. This shows God reaching out to people who have not called upon him. The Gospels show Jesus reaching out to Gentiles. We see this when he ministered to Greeks, to a Syro-Phoenician woman, to a Samaritan woman by a well, to a Roman centurion, and to a Gerasene, here. Then, after his ascension, he reached out to all Gentiles through the Apostle Paul who preached the word to Gentiles.

Subsequent to Pentecost, all these people to whom Jesus ministered had Jesus’ Spirit within them to guide them toward the truth. We, too, have this Spirit. We have always had this wonderful gift, even from childhood. Last week we were told, in Ephesians, “to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:23–24). We are to let God’s message flow out through us, in word and deed.

If we are renewed in the spirit of our minds, then we have a new self, a new and spiritual motivation. The Gerasene demoniac in today’s story presumably obtained a new mission and motive for living after he was rid of evil spirits. His assignment was to be a witness, to tell his fellow countrymen what God did for him. There were a number of these unofficial evangelists, people who stayed in their home town and told the story of their encounter with Jesus. The Samaritan woman at the well was one. The Roman centurion whose servant was healed would be another. Their message rippled out through their neighborhood. No doubt caravan travelers through these locations would hear of these events and possibly spread the message even further. Word of mouth is how news was distributed in those days.

Now, one of these people was living in tombs in a state of insanity, another was living with a man out of wedlock and was not particularly happy, the last one was heartbroken over the paralysis and illness of a beloved servant (Matt 8:6). Mental, social, and physical problems were all within Jesus’ range of merciful treatment. I think that is still true today. His teachings can help people overcome mental imbalances and fears, to not be crushed by social disapproval, and even to be healed of physical afflictions.

A pastor/counselor named Heath Lambert insists that mental illnesses are really spiritual illnesses, and that we need not follow the lead of secular psychology, but can use biblical truth to seek healing. Isaiah said that people can hear and can understand, can turn and be healed (Isa 6:10). Psalm 147 says God “heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (147:3). Jesus can deal with all problems of the heart.

How does that affect us today? Do we have mental ruts or emotional problems? Are we being judged by our neighbors? Are we physically ill? I can’t guarantee that any or all of these problems will be solved by faith and prayer, but I *can* guarantee that God will respond to your sincere faith, that God will make inroads into your heart, and that *every* instance of sincere prayer is successful in that way.

At the very end of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says “in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (15:58). Your efforts to get through to God are not in vain. God may not—in fact, almost certainly *will not*—answer you in exactly the way you hope, but God *does* hear, and does touch your heart, which is the greatest answer of all. So much of what happens with spirit action is outside the range of our consciousness, and may be realized by us only slowly.

“Deep calls to deep,” today’s psalm says (42:7). The deep that is within us calls to the deeps in God, and God hears. “At night his song is with me,” it says (42:8). The psalmist ends up calling God “my help and my God” (42:11). Call upon your help, call out from deep to deep, and trust that God will make inroads into your soul every time you call.

I have an extraordinary story of answered prayer. It is about a Zimbabwean named Stephen Lungu who became a teenage gang leader. He went to an Evangelical tent meeting once with some petrol bombs, intending to torch the place and kill some Christians. But something told him to go inside and listen first. There he heard the message; he put down his bombs and he was converted. He became a powerful preacher who gave many public talks. Thirty years later he was giving a talk, and two little old ladies near the front started gesturing at him. He said “I see you, and I will talk to you as soon as I am done.” But they insisted that he come immediately; they had something to show him. “You are the answer to our prayer,” one of them said. Intrigued, he went over. They showed him what was written in the back of their Bible. It had a date in 1962, and their prayer, “Jesus, may you save one gang leader today.” Lungu was astounded. He said “that is the date I was saved. But I didn’t see you at the tent meeting.” They said “we weren’t there, but we knew it was happening, and we prayed that Jesus would save one gang leader. It turns out he saved you, and you are the answer to our prayer.”

I’ve never had an answer so amazing, but I have had answered prayers, and probably you have, too.