**Luke 8, Part B**

What do you think about all the stores in the gospels about demon possession? Are they evidence that the Bible was written in a primitive time, for primitive minds? Or are they evidence that our modern American materialist worldview is severly lacking.

The Bible tells us that everything we see and experience is part of one dimension, but there are actually multiple, overlapping dimensions. In the beginning there was one infinite, timeless, omnipotent spiritual being. This being created two realms. He created the physical realm which we see and experience. But he also created a spiritual realm filled with millions of energy-filled personalities that we call angels. They interact with this physical world, yet they are not exactly part of it. A large portion of these spiritual beings rebelled against the creator out of some desire for glory or power, and were condemned to another realm which we call Hell, but evidentally they call they Abyss. For a time these beings have been allowed to roam this earth where they found an easy target: humanity.

We humans occupy a unique position. We are the creatures that bridge the spirit realm and the physical realm. Angels, on the one hand, don’t have bodies. Dogs and cats, on the other, don’t have spirits. But we have both. We bridge the divide. We have a special role in his creation. So those evil, rebellious spirits convinced the first humans to join in their rebellion hoping to ruin all of creation.

These forces are at work today. They work in very sophisticated ways. Like Satan in the garden of Eden, they very subtly try to trick us into sinning. They convince us. They make evil seem fun, empowering, worthwhile. They are good at mocking the truth. But this reading shows us the truth behind their lies. This shows us the goal of the evil spirits. They are good at arousing our pride, our hatred, our fury. Because they want to make us the objects of their hatred and fury. They are doomed to destruction, and their goal is to destroy us.

Today, we will see Jesus encounter a man who has experienced the full wrath of the demons fury. After sailing across the lake and calming the storm, Jesus heads to Gentile country and encounters one of the creepiest characters in the whole Bible: **They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.**

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

I’m going to read from a book I recommend to all of you:

“By any standard and by every measure, these demons were unclean spirits. The spirits drove this man into graves carved into the side of a hill. … Living among dead bones and decaying bodies suggests something very unclean and very unnatural. They were not fit to be friends with God or with humans. Look what they did to the person whose body they possessed! The demons ripped clothes off their victim. No decency, no bonds, no shackles, and no chains could restrain the demons in this man. With superhuman strength, these unrestrained bullies attacked innocent neighbors who had not learned to avoid the tombs. Unable to escape and unable to run away, these passersby were beaten by the fists of a man who could not control the impulses of the demons that brought those fists upon his neighbors. The man certainly endured physical pain. But did it compare to the shame and isolation and self-loathing that the demons forced upon him?

Demons are not content to be unclean themselves. Their desire is to make everything and everyone they touch repulsive, unapproachable, and shameful to God and to people. The writers of the gospels saw with their own eyes how the terrible demons treated their victims. They saw the terrible outcome of being possessed by unclean spirits, namely, isolation, impurity, shame, loneliness, depression, and humiliation. The writers of the gospels want to show us—God wants to show us—the true nature of demons. This is what demons do to people. They possess people in order to oppress them in every way possible. Jesus called them unclean spirits. That description still fits demons, who are still seeking to possess us. Possess is a good and accurate word in this instance. Observe their behavior. See what they do. They seek to own us. Once they have possession of us, their will is not to protect us as you or I might want to protect a possession. Not demons. Their will regarding the ones they possess is to humiliate, to hurt, and, finally, to drag into eternal judgment. Hell is the demons’ destiny. Demons know it, and they work hard to drag humans into it.” - E. Allen Sorum, 2000 Demons. Abridged.

Notice, the demons recognized Jesus. The realized who he was- the Son of that Most High God, the creator and sustainer of all things, the one against whom the demons had rebelled and thereby banished themselves from all his love and goodness. They were feared with terror at his torments and dread at their final judgement in the abyss.

Jesus was not speaking with the man. The man was a victim. We don’t know how he let the demons into his life. Perhaps through occult-like worship of some ancient Greek gods. Perhaps through trying to communicate with the dead. But somehow they came in and took over. The disciples must have been terrified at the sight of this man. His strength, his pure rage, his obvious possesion. The name “Legion” must have been particularly terrifying. It represented unstoppable, organized, violent force against which you cannot stand. The Roman legions were the unconquerable super soldiers of their day. And yet, here was Jesus, steadily and confidently confronting this demon. Not only did have have a handle on the wind and the waves, he also had mastery over the the unseen spiritual realm. And when he commanded them, he gave the disciples a chance to see that they really were a Legion:

**A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, 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.**

As terrifying as these demons were, they had not choice to submit to the rebuke of our Lord Jesus. Here they are, the abusers. They have abused this poor man, and actually, we read in Matthew that were were two, but they have abused them to no end. But now, hear them beg. Please, please don’t send us to the abyss yet. So instead, Jesus sends them to the pigs. No doubt this is largely if not entirely for the sake of the disciples, not the demons, so they can see just what they were up against. They filled the pigs, Mark tells us there were 2000 of them, and lead them to hurl themselves into the water.

What they did to the pigs is exactly what they want to do with everyone and everything they come into contact with. They want to lead you, and me on the same path to self-destruction that they have chosen for themselves. (Pause) But Jesus had come to save this man. He was saved. The disciples need not fear, and we need not fear. In fact, this was all Jesus plan from the beginning. It was his idea to randomly sail over the lake when there was a storm coming. Why? First to reveal his power over this physical world, and now to reveal his absolute power over the spiritual world. That’s it. Now it would be time to get back in the boat and go back to Capernaum. Because Jesus knew he would not be welcome:

**When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.**

This is remarkable. You would think the people would be filled with awe, or thanks. But they were terrified of Jesus’ power. Perhaps they were concerned about the livlihood of their flocks and herds as well. Can you imagine the shock of the disciples? Or the shock of the formerly-possessed man. You mean, you’re not happy for me? You mean, you’re not excited to welcome this man Jesus into our city and thank him for all he’s done? How disappointing. He was ready to get out of town. So:

**The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.**

There’s a lesson here. When God does something amazing in your life, you become the most effective witness your friends and family could have. God is getting some of you through illnesses. He’s getting others through difficult personal problems. People notice that. And it makes them open to hearing the good news about Jesus from you in a way that they might not normally be open to hearing. So seize those opportunities.

But I want to dwell a little more on the first part of the story about demon possession. Do we really believe this is true? I want to tell you I emphatically do. I’ve had my own creepy, seemingly demonic experiences. I’d tell you them in private if you want, but they are too creepy, and too private, to share from the pulpit. If it were just me, I wouldn’t put too much stock in it. I’ve heard the same stories from too many pastors and missionaries all over the US and the world for me to have lingering doubts that this stuff still happens today. Pastors in Wisconsin, Tennessee, Minnesota, Georgia, and one I talked to in Washington not too long ago walking into cold rooms and hearing strange voices from erratically behaving people. People who calm down and return to normal at the name of Jesus. In China and places where they still worship lots of different gods, this is more common. I had a friend who was attacked viciously when he because a Christian. His father was sort of a witch doctor and his household idols tried to stop him from becoming a Christian with some chilling appearances.

For you, this is just anecdotal evidence. You don’t have to believe it. I would guess most of you believe me, some know about this stuff all too well, and some are skeptical. Believe my anecdotes or not, but we all need to believe the gospels. And either the gospels are wrong, and backwards and primitive, or our scientific worldview that ignores the spiritual realm needs to be reconsidered.

That being said, do not seek it out. Leave it alone. It’s not for entertainment. The only spirit we want to interact with is the holy spirit. Seeking out interactions with these spirits would more foolish than trying to commune with the grizzlies. They are fascinating, true. But they are a lot more interested in eating you than having a chat or being your friend. And we don’t fully understand how they work. So stay away.

But for the handful out there who might have these kind of experiences by accident, the reaction is simple: Pray to Jesus. Do not try to interact with evil spirits. Not even to fight them. They are smarter and stronger than you. But they can only beg for mercy when they encounter Jesus. Which is convenient, because you belong to Jesus. Your baptism put his name on you. He dwells in you, and his holy spirit lives in your heart and fills you with his power. This is why most of us will never have to deal with this kind of stuff. But if we do, simply ask Jesus to drive them away. Even just callling on Jesus’ name might even be enough. They can only obey him and flee. Don’t dread it. Don’t live in fear of it, just as we don’t need to live in fear of anything when Jesus has our backs.

Though most of us will never have these kind of creepy experiences first-hand, we are living in the middle of a spiritual battlefield. If God would open our eyes to the spiritual realm right now we would probably see angels and demons flying aroeund battling over us. We would see the forces of evil coming in to destroy and God’s angels coming in to deliver us from evil. God wants us to see that all evil ultimately has this evil from the spiritual realm at its root. He wants us to see, hatred, rage, and malicous lies and false teachings all as coming from the evil side.

In this sense we are all being attacked by the forces of evil every day. I think we can confess, we have not taken this spiritual battle as seriously as we should. When we say something hurtful towards a spouse or a loved one because we don’t feel like being nice, we tend to say, “Oh, I’m having a bad day.” Instead we should fall on our knees in repentant realization that we have given in to the hateful, destructive invisible forces that have put this world on the path to Hell. When we take seriously the lies of this world, when we give credence and respect to the intellectuals who are doing their best to lead us away from God, we think we are being open-minded and intelligent. Instead we should have a twinge of horror at the realization we are being subtly seduced into joining the great rebellion against God, the great rebellion that would lead to our eternal enslavement.

A special warning. Demons love abuse. See what they did to the man in our story. If anyone here ever find him or herself abusing others verbally, physically, or otherwise, woe to them. The demons smile at such things while the angels weep. Why would I say something like that? Come on, we’re all Christians here, right? Exactly. And you better realize, because you are a Christian, you have an invisible target on your back. If the forces of evil can lead you to great sin, not only can they take you out, they can smear God’s name while they do it. And leaders in the church, teachers, I realize on me too, we make an even bigger prize. This should be a humbling realization for us all. We need to be vigilent and aware.

Which is why we need this story to remind us that Jesus has absolute power and authority over the forces of evil and absolute love and mercy for us. We don’t need to be afraid of these things. Jesus is looking out for us. When we pray, “deliver us from evil,” he always answers the prayer. No doubt he has legions of protective angels who has kept us and will keep us from untold numbers of temptations and evil attacks. When he does let us experience a temptation, such as a blind rage, it is only to teach us to rely on him him. Because he has all the power. When the last day comes, he will hurl the forces of evil into the abyss forever. He will meanwhile take us to be with himself forever.

And this reminds us of his mercy. We see that in so many of our readings in Luke. Jesus hates the misery that evil causes in this world. Whether it’s more dramatic stuff like demon possession and death, or more mundane things like illness and hatred, Jesus can’t stand it. He has infinite compassion on our sorry state. He subjected himself to this miserible human condition we experience so that he could redeem us from it, and he has. His death and resurrection overcame sin, overcame death, and overcame the forces of evil. We depend on his powerful, absolute kindness, forgiveness, and compassion to save us from this world and one day completely deliver us from evil. We’ll celebrate and contemplate that with our next hymn.

**Part B:**

As mentioned, I decided that the first reading deserved a full-length sermon, so we will just read these passages with a few comments. Here we see two connected healings. A twelve year old girls and a woman suffering for 12 years. They may never have met each other before, but long before God had ordained that Jesus would touch both of their lives and leave a remarkable impression on his disciples this day:

**Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus’ feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. “Who touched me?” Jesus asked. [see photo] When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.” But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.” Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”** We see how Jesus not only cured her body, but strengthened her faith through this small trial. So also Jesus strengthens and encourages us when we are weak.

**Part C:**

The delay must have frustrated Jairus, who was in a race against time. And the worst news came: **While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” he said. “Don’t bother the teacher any more.” Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.”** Jairus did not have a blind faith. He had a promise from Jesus that he would take care of us, and he realized he could trust that promise against all odds. That is what faith is. It is not blind. It is based on God’s promises to us. And when God’s promises seem impossible, we know that all things are possible with God.

**When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child’s father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. “Stop wailing,” Jesus said. “She is not dead but asleep.” They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, “My child, get up!” Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.** We have seen Jesus compassion for a demon possessed man, a woman who had spent her life saving fighting a disease for 12 years, and the family of a little girl who had died. All very different situations. But Jesus had the healing and salvation that each one of them needed. The same is true for us. Whatever strength, whatever healing, whatever salvation you need, Jesus has it. Because he has aleady provided the greatest salvation, the salvation from sin, which he will give us soon in the sacrament of his body and blood. And so now we’ll take a moment to prepare for that.