

Sunday, June 23, 2019 – 2nd Sunday after Pentecost
“What Do You Have to Do With Me?”

Luke 8: 26-39

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Comparison/Contrast Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Have you ever had the experience of feeling down, frustrated with a hard circumstance in your life and then you hear the story of someone else and think to yourself, “Wow... I thought I had it bad”? Of all the miracles Jesus does in the four Gospels this one sticks out to me as the situation I'd least like to be in. I wouldn't want to be on a rickety 1st century boat in a storm terrified for my life, or have leprosy and be not only sick but separated from my community, or be born blind and beg by a pool all day, nor would I want to be one of the several people suffering with illness to the point of death before Jesus raised them but most of all I'd be most terrified to suffer as the man in the country of the Geresenes in Luke 8. He's not only alone, and ill, and naked... but demon possessed and living in a graveyard. This is the closest thing to death that could be experienced by the living and a most horrible death at that. This is hell on earth.

Before continuing on a quick aside to say that there are spiritual realities beyond what we can comprehend. Jesus, victor over sin, death and the devil shows Himself a trustworthy witness. I know that we don't often talk about demon possession in a 21st century Western context unless it's as a film genre but Scripture speaks, and Jesus confronts and addresses it as reality. If you have skepticism about this account let's schedule a time to talk but I believe and I'm going to speak very clearly under the assumption of this not being a metaphor or a pre-scientific myth to make sense of mental illness as of yet unknown or misunderstood but as a very real, literal, straightforward account of Jesus – God incarnate – being master of all things in the spiritual realm.

One of the confusing things about this text is wondering who is addressing Jesus when the man says, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?!” In other words “Why won't you leave me alone?” There's some ambiguity here. Is it the demons possessing him speaking? Is it the man himself?

Let's say it's the demons. Why won't you leave me alone? It's important to notice a few things going on here. The first thing is that the demon possessed man approaches Jesus. When he saw Jesus he cried out and fell down before him. There's no getting away from God. Also notice that he accurately calls out Jesus' identity. His personal name, Jesus. His being the Son of the most High God – the 2nd person of the Trinity. Even demons, even satan, are under God's authority. They can't move a finger without God's consent. It's not like you have equal and opposite opposing forces here. This isn't yin and yang or the light side and dark side of the force being in balance. That's eastern philosophy and Star Wars, respectively, and that's not at all compatible with the Christian worldview. God and satan aren't entangled in some eternal tension or struggle. Jesus is in charge here. Period. End of sentence. The demons ask to be left alone because they have no power, no authority, no control to oppose anything Jesus chooses to do next.

This is a huge encouragement for you and me. The devil is crafty and a great observer of human behavior. He studies us carefully and expertly looks for ways to deceive and trip us up and compared to us, he's "smart." But he can't read your mind and he, while able to overpower us and pick us off when we're off on our own is no match for Jesus.

We get to ask the opposite question of the demons. Instead of "what have you to do with me?" We beg for intervention. Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil." God is powerful to do this and a loving God who promises such intervention. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." The devil has nothing on God.

Remember though there's some ambiguity – who's asking the question? The demons or the man who is possessed? "What have you to do with me?" We don't know how this man came to be demon possessed but it's likely he opened himself up in some way – worship of false gods, magic arts, seances, fortune telling – who knows what it was that opened the door. This man is enduring hell on earth. Separation from human community. Fear and derision from the townsfolk. Shame at his own nakedness. Having only the company of evil and tormenting demons from whom he's unable to escape. And now God in human flesh is walking up to you.

In his shame (I am bad) in his guilt (I've done bad things) in his humiliation (I'm open and exposed in full) he expects further piling on if not his outright destruction.

This after all is what it is for evil to be in the presence of a holy God. The Philistines who stole the ark of the covenant, God's earthly throne were afflicted with plagues. Those who tried to peer into the ark of the covenant died. Isaiah, seeing God in a vision cried out, "Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips from a people of unclean lips."

Plenty a person feels abject terror at facing God here. I mean not just the run of the mill unworthy, in the way the average weekly worshipper enters this sanctuary and speaks during their confession of their sin every time we gather to worship but this certitude that they are most certainly about to be slammed down by God. To believe that their own sins are so unspeakable that while God might forgive others, He isn't going to forgive ME. That while God will free others from their temptation, or their oppression, or their guilty – not mine. Not me, when I've injured or killed someone behind the wheel. Not me, when I've taken lives in the line of duty. Not me, who aborted my baby. Not me, living in the secret pain of pornography, or same sex attraction. Not me, who cheated on my wife. Not me, who made a mess of all my relationships through lies and deceiving to support my drug habit. Not me, who other kids at school bully. Not me, used and abused by others and treated as worthless. What have you to do with ME, Jesus?

We may deserve nothing good from God but you – yes you, precisely in your cry of "What have you to do with ME?" are the reason Jesus has come. It's non-sensical to the world – like the townsfolk and herdsmen in an uproar when this demon possessed man is clothed and in his right mind before Jesus after being healed, some think it incredulous that God would give this second chance to everyone but He does. It's for you, it's for me. Jesus' answer to our cry of "What have you to do with me?" is a cross, where our sins are judged. A tomb, where death and the power of the devil in our lives is destroyed. Baptism, where we are adopted into His family, deeply loved and claimed. Communion, for ongoing strength to face the temptations and trials that come to us. Christian community, to further bolster us and not only provide help and accountability but also strength and where He uses us to help bolster others. And then you and me are sent into this world on God's mission so that ever more people experience freedom from

their own personal hell on earth by the power of Jesus, who has authority over everything, including the things that have the most power over us. In Jesus' name, Amen.