

“Not Always How We Expect”

Talking Points Delivered by A J Johnson 06-23-19

1 Kings 19:9-13; Psalm 42; Psalm 22:19-28; **Luke 8:26-39**

Lets pray... May the meditation of my heart and the words of my mouth be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight...

Church, this morning the Lord has bought us to a curious point in Luke 8.

Luke, our physician disciple, tells us of an event in which Jesus encounters a man filled with demons.

After casting out demons in our reading this morning, he will go on to heal a hemorrhaging woman and a twelve-year-old girl.

Like any good healthcare worker speaking of the events of the day, Luke writes of Jesus, the great doctor, healing people of what ails them in what turns out to be a normal day of healing with this extraordinary healer.

Like any good recorder of health care events, I find Luke never mentions details casually.

You have to pay particular attention to Luke's details.

Luke could just have told us this is how the patient presented, this is what cured him, because in fact, Jesus is the cure for what ails you. That would have been how any health care worker might have listed it and it would be fine.

But when God speaks through Luke in this instance, God provides extraordinary details.

Luke tells us that they have come into and sailed to the region of Gerasene. And the location is important here, and we'll get back to that in a minute, where they are confronted by a demon-possessed man.

This poor man, naked, and so overcome by violent impulses that he cannot be restrained even with chains and leg-shackles.

So severe is his condition, that he has been excluded from the city, living among the tombs. In his society, he has become the ultimate outcast, just not fit to be around decent folks.

And Luke gives us details that shows all the signs that the ancients used to diagnose possession by an unclean

spirit. (See *Discussion of Mark's account of the Gerasene demoniac in Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man. A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2008), pp. 190–194.*)

And the ancients were clear how to treat a possession such as this...you shackle the person, the ancients thought, so that they do as little harm to themselves and others, and eventually, historians tell us, the ancients believed that the possession would end.

But this treatment had not worked. The man was neither cured, nor safe. The scripture tells us that he would frequently break out of his chains. In other words, man's medication wouldn't work. It required something special. It required Jesus.

Now Luke tells us the specific location where the event takes place – The Gerasene region.

The region of Gerasene is the setting of a horrifying historical event. According to Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, toward the end of the Jewish revolt, the Roman general Vespasian sent soldiers to retake this community after the Jews had tried to rise up against their oppressors, The Romans. (*Jewish War*, IV,ix,1).

The Romans so consumed with eliminating the uprising, killed a thousand young men whom they felt had led or participated in the uprising.

They imprisoned their families. They burned the city. And then the army attacked villages throughout the region.

Many of those buried in Gerasene tombs had been slaughtered by those Roman legions.

Up until this moment in the story when Jesus confronts the naked, possessed and afraid man, the event tells like a simple healing. A simple miracle of healing, if there is such a thing as a ‘simple miracle’.

For people in the ancient Roman world, for this group of people located in this region especially, to use the word, “Legion” had only one literal meaning: a unit of approximately six thousand Roman soldiers, the occupying army.

This is not just a guy with “some issues”. This is a man whose plight on the outside could only scratch the surface of what was going on on his inside.

This is a man under attack, bound mercilessly to things that would not let him go. Those issues that bound him, had him under control.

Now we have a connection to the greater community and I believe an invitation into finding a deeper meaning in the story.

As we read Jesus casts the demons out of the man and into a herd of swine. And some of you are familiar with farms. A “herd” of swine is a lot of pigs.

Jesus casts ‘legion’ into the herd of swine and the swine run off a cliff into the lake and drown.

The swine herders see what has happened and they goes out to the community at large, the city and the country, NRSV tells us, to call attention to this event.

The people come out to see what had happened, and when they come to Jesus, they find the man, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed in his right mind. The man who was once bound is now free. Harkening to the often paraphrased scripture ‘the one whom Jesus sets free, is free indeed’.

And do the townspeople rejoice? No.

Do they find somewhere in their hearts to feel compassion for the now healed man? No.

Do they take the opportunity to ask the majestic healer to tarry for a moment and heal others? No.

The scripture says the townspeople ‘were seized with great fear.’ And ask Jesus to leave.

After all, a herd of swine suddenly dying is a big deal. That was the herder’s lively hood. In other words, Jesus was “messing with their stuff”.

Jesus didn’t send the blessing in the way that the community would have wanted. Freedom for this man, the townspeople thought and felt, came at a cost for the townspeople.

The answers to this man’s situation didn’t come in the way anyone was expecting.

Much like Elijah in 1 Kings, our first reading. In this reading God wasn’t in the earthquake. He wasn’t in the fire. Elijah the prophet had asked of God, ‘help me’. People are after me. It’ was really a heartfelt call from

the depths of Elijah's current problem...God, please show Yourself.

God sent all manner of natural events and Elijah found God speaking to him not through any of the ways he was expecting, but God spoke to Elijah in a still small wind.

So, what's the take away here?

A couple things.

First, we all struggle with the many things that can bind us, and keep us trapped, unable to move forward in our relationships. Unable to move forward from the pains of the past.

We can all fill in the blanks here. Illness, immigration challenges, school issues, marital strife, family trouble, financial woes.

The list is potentially endless.

Just like the man of Gerasenes it's not just one. Worries kind of come in multiples. Example: immigration issues invite worry, worry invites fear, fear

and the worry bring despair, and if you're not careful hopelessness.

Hopelessness brings a poor countenance, because we will collapse under the weight of all that we carry alone.

In the gospels, Jesus says "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." *Matt 11:28-30*

Our burdens are just as real to us and just as dramatic as the man in the Gerasene whom Jesus healed.

Stuck in what the enemy intended for our demise, and unable to move forward. We feel like we are under siege by the multitude of problems, and issues. Like it's 6000 to 1, and we're the one.

We become exhausted because we carry a heavy burden that Christ NEVER ment for us to carry alone.

Yet we stand firmly in the loving presence of a God who says the deliverance He's done for one, He'll do the same thing for you.

The same God whom the Psalmist in Psalm 42 ‘as a deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you’

...my soul thirsts for the living God’

God wants us to seek Him like we would the very breath that we need to take. There is nothing too hard for our God to do!

And God loves you so much there is nothing that He won’t do for you to bring you closer to Him.

No matter what it is, God seeks to loose the chains that bind us and keep us from enjoying the abundant life that God has promised us, and longs to share with us. No matter what you’re going through, let God lift your burden. Give it to Jesus!

Second, we are advised, and warned by a very careful and detailed disciple Luke of the following.

When you are blessed and delivered. When you are unbound by whatever situation, circumstance, event or negative person that has you bound, there will be those like the townspeople who will not share in your joy.

I believe in the current vernacular, they are called ‘haters’.

There will be those who will be so convinced because of their limited view of God, that your blessing means something negative for them, just like those townspeople with the delivered man.

Jesus’ words to the now delivered man are the same to us today, Luke 8:39 ‘...declare how much God has done for you.’

Proclaim the Living God anyway. Praise Him anyway.

And if no one praises Him with you, call me, or one of the members in this church. We’ll praise God with you!

Go through the citys and the counties, and your own circles, and tell anyone and everyone what God has done for you!

Declare like the psalmist in Psalm 42:5 “Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”

God says in Isaiah 65:1 that He ‘was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who didn’t seek me’.

As believers we know that what every soul needs is a deep and abiding relationship with God. Your testimony of what God did for you just may be the one thing that person needs to hear.

They may not have even been seeking God until they heard your testimony.

All of that hinges upon salvation in Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us over and over that there is only **one** way to salvation and to God, and that is through the cross of Christ and our relationship with Him who was crucified.

If you came in here today without the certainty of knowing Christ for yourself please see me or one of our Elders after worship. We'd be glad to share the gospel with you.

Our currently serving Elders raise your hands.

The message of Jesus Christ, the Holy and Risen One, to the man He delivered is really quite simple. Trust in Him and He will deliver you from that which has you bound, and go and declare what God has done for you.

Christ's message to the community is quite simple as well. He may not answer situations in the way we want Him to, but He answers how we need Him to.

May we each be found like the 'delivered man of Gerasenes' quietly sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in our right minds demonstrating that the God of deliverance is still breaking chains.

Amen.

.