

“Who Do We Avoid?”

Luke 8:26-39

When I sit on a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, I look to the west and north and see gentle slopes and fertile ground. I see where Jesus fed the 5,000 and preached the Sermon on the Mount. I see green fields, towns, and buildings. Then I turn to the east. No green. No buildings. Brown, steep cliffs and plateaus that look very different from the fertile Galilee. To the east it looks scary in the country of Gerasenes.

It wouldn't help to get caught in a storm on the way to the country of the Gerasenes. In the verse immediately preceding our gospel text we find this story . . . Luke 8:22-25: ²²One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they put out, ²³and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. ²⁴They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?"

So as they set out across the lake to the country of the Gerasenes they get caught in high wind, raging waves, and their boat begins to take on water. Jesus asks, “Where is your faith?”

And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even wind and water, and they obey him?”

Then they arrived at the country of Gerasenes which is opposite Galilee. And as he stepped out on land there met him a man from the city who had demons; for a long time he had worn no clothes, and he lived not in a house but among the tombs.

After being terrified in the middle of the lake, watching your friend rebuke the wind and waves, and then finally reaching the other shore to be confronted by a naked man living in a cemetery! You think your life is stressful???

When I was serving in Nebraska, I took our church staff to Lincoln for some continuing education. Dr. Jack Stark, team psychologist for the Husker football team talked to us about what causes stress in our life. He said the top four areas where people look for happiness in the midst of a stressful life are No. 1 - in our family life; No. 2 - in our spiritual life; No. 3 - in having good health; and No. 4 - in financial security.

Where we look for happiness are also the same places that can give us the most stress. When our family life goes wrong, when our health turns bad, when we're in the hole financially, and when we ignore our spiritual life or begin to doubt our faith in Jesus Christ, we become stressed.

When we become stressed and angry, according to Dr. Stark, we take it out on another

family member, the pastor, or whoever else is willing to listen. That is what we're here for, to listen and to be an alternative to prozac, the No. 1 prescribed drug in America. We are here to listen to, to affirm, and to compliment stressed out people who tend to focus on one negative in their lives while ignoring 9 positives; focus on one criticism, while ignoring 9 compliments.

Jesus' followers are stressed out after getting caught in a storm in the middle of the lake and now being confronted by a naked man living in a cemetery. This naked man seems to be even more stressed out than they are.

This was a man who had been kept under guard, bound with chains and fetters, but he had broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the desert. This was a man who had gone over the edge. He was crazy. He was demon-possessed. Nothing could make him happy. He'd abandoned his family or they had abandoned him. His health was out of control when he would fall to the ground in a demonic and naked frenzy. He had no money. And his spiritual life was demon controlled.

Have you ever been confronted by anyone like this? Are you like this? It seems that just after surviving a storm in our life as the disciples survived the storm, we're immediately confronted with someone who needs a lot of help or we discover that we need a lot of help.

Nothing can make us happy. Our family life is a mess. Spouses are growing apart and children always seem to be angry. Our health is deteriorating. Our finances are in shambles.

And the devil is winning the battle in our faith life.

Then as much as we've tried to avoid him, as much as we've tried to avoid worship and church, as much as we've tried to avoid Holy Communion, as much as we've tried to avoid other family members and close friends, as much as we've tried to avoid prayer and God, as much as we've tried to avoid Jesus; he steps into our life anyway and we're forced to see him, to hear him, to feel him.

When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God? I beseech you, do not torment me."

For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. The demon-possessed man confesses his faith in Jesus Christ. He knows who Jesus is. "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God? I beseech you, do not torment me." Leave me alone. Stay over on the other side of the lake. Stay over on the other side of the street. Why did you ever cross over? Let me go directly from Harpos to Busch Funeral Home. Don't make me have to cross over to see you on the cross, to hear your word from scripture, to feel your presence in Holy Communion.

Jesus has gone over there amongst the tombstones, in strange and unfamiliar surroundings to ask the stressed out, lost, and naked man, "What is your name?" What is your

name?

And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. Alcohol, drugs, anger, adultery, stealing, selfishness, hatred; for many demons had entered him and he said, “Legion.”

And all of the demons begged Jesus not to command them to try to cross Blossom Avenue that they would fall into the abyss. They did not want to cross the chaos to the place found on the other side. They want to stay separated from the kingdom of God and remain in their own demonic hell.

When we’re demon-possessed we avoid everything and everybody that has anything to do with Jesus Christ. But eventually, something happens that brings us into God’s presence even in the country of the Gerasenes on the other side of the street where we thought we could hide. Instead our demons are confronted. Our demons are told to leave us.

“Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them leave.”

He gave them leave. He gave them permission. Get out of here. The Messiah did not come to destroy the demonic powers but to deliver humans like you and me from their influence.

I watched a retired woman gamble away her entire retirement savings as though demon possessed. I’ve watch a man give up his wife and children for alcohol and drugs. I’ve listened

to stories of adultery, lust, and destruction. I've felt anger and stress out of control.

No matter what the demon seeking to control our life, we avoid church and worship, we avoid Holy Communion, we avoid Sunday School and the pastor, we avoid family members and close friends, we avoid prayer and God, we avoid Jesus Christ.

He steps into our life anyway, usually when we've hit rock bottom, so we can see him, hear him, feel him. He gives the demons permission to leave. He gives us life. He gives us peace.

Read Luke 8:34-39 . . . ³⁴When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then 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. And they were afraid. ³⁶Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you. So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Who do we avoid? What do we avoid? The naked and demon-possessed man could

avoid Jesus no longer. Now with the demons gone, he is sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. But the people from the surrounding country are afraid and ask Jesus to depart from them. Something had happened that made the people very uncomfortable.

The people of that country are going to become even more uncomfortable when this same man who lived naked in the cemetery returns home proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

When Jesus touches our life, when Jesus heals our wounds, when Jesus gives the demons permission to leave us, when we experience Jesus' presence in Holy Communion and worship, when Jesus speaks to us through those people closest to us, when Jesus steps into our life even though we've tried to avoid him; do we respond by proclaiming throughout the whole city what Jesus has done for us?

Who do we avoid? What do we avoid? "Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you."

#779 - Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound