

Second Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): "Mob"
Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39
June 21-22, 2025
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

What words in this Gospel grab you by the throat? What details in the story puzzle you or speak to you?

Exorcisms are usually **last** on the list of things Jesus does, miracles He performs, that interest me. I can identify with other experiences more closely: storms, illness, even death. But demon possession??

This one catches my interest because we get such rich detail. It's the **most** elaborate of **all** the exorcisms in **all** of Scripture. It leaves me wanting to know more. Like:

- Was it **just** the demons who drove the possessed man into the caves that served as tombs? Or did the townspeople drive him out of their community, afraid he would harm them or that his situation could be contagious? The mentally ill have certainly been ostracized, persecuted, sometimes executed, through the ages, in certain cultures. If we judge someone as not quite right, we might say they are "touched." Indigenous cultures are more apt to believe they are "touched by the divine."
- **Why** did the man meet Jesus as he came off the boat? If he lived in the tombs, why was he down by the shore? We'll never know the answer to that question.
- But **why** did the possessed man fall down at Jesus' feet? Prostration often means worship. So if the demons worshiped Jesus they wouldn't be **fallen** angels anymore! But Bible scholars make a distinction between worship and "obedience." Obedience is obedience-because-you-know-better-than-to-disobey. (There'll be hell to pay?) We may not actually agree with someone but if we know they're a lot more powerful

than we are, we may obey them. Kinda like the possessed man falling down at Jesus' feet.

- **Why** does the possessed man shout, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God"? (Always interesting that the demons in the New Testament always seem to recognize Jesus' true identity while the humans often don't.) This is a bunch of demons who want to get in the first and the last words. They come out swinging, maybe hoping to get Jesus off-balance. But also they have a request: don't just evict us into the air, send us into those pigs. (So odd... That they ask **and** that Jesus says yes.) They **beg**, asking Jesus not to **torment** them. (Some translations go with the word *torture*.) So off they go, into the pigs and over the cliff into the water. You get the importance of the water, right? Baptism is a form of exorcism, and uses water. The Wicked Witch of the West is melted by a bucket of water. Supposed witches in England, Scotland, and New England, were sentenced to death by drowning. (Though the official word was that if they were innocent they'd float and not sink. I don't think anyone floated.)
- We aren't apt to ask, "What have you to do with me, Jesus?" but we very well may have prayed along the way, "What do you want from me, Jesus?" either when we pray with open hearts for holy direction of our lives, **or** when we feel and fear that living out our faith is more painful, time-consuming, or challenging than we anticipated: "What do you want from me, Jesus?"
- Jesus' answer to us is, "Everything." This story of the Gerasene demoniac reminds us in the best possible way that Jesus "owns" us.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:19-20)

In a couple other translations of this story, the possessed man's answer to Jesus' question, "What is your name?" is *Mob*. The word *Legion* doesn't grab me by the throat like *Mob* does. To me, *Mob* says, "There's a whole gang of thugs holding me hostage, from the inside out." So one of the last questions this story leaves me with is, "Whom do I know, **now**, who has demons? Who in my life is victim to a Mob of spiritual outlaws?" Who is out of his or her mind with addiction, mental illness, anxiety, despair? These days afflicted people are not apt to be running around naked, living in cemeteries, shackled by their neighbors. They present much more normally, but are no less in anguish. I like how this author makes a very old story relevant to us today:

The story of the Gerasene demoniac should now be interpreted so that it speaks a word of assurance and hope to those for whom every day is a battle with depression, fear, anxiety, or compulsive behavior. They will understand what would lead a person to say that his name is "mob" (legion). With such a response the man had acknowledged he no longer had any individual identity. He had lost his name. He had lost his individuality... It was as though a Roman legion was at war within him.¹

We're well aware our loved ones who suffer in any of these ways are in need of Jesus' healing touch. We also know that divine healing is often channeled through human beings: physicians, nurses, therapists of various kinds, anyone in the healing professions. We believe in God **and** we believe in science. We don't think that's a contradiction. **Sometimes**, though, we lean **solely** on humans, medicines, and technology to heal us, and we leave God out of the equation. That's a mistake. **All** healing ultimately comes from God. Holy Communion grants the healing of the soul through forgiveness of our sins, but it can also grant healing of our body. Soul, body and mind are profoundly connected. If one part of us is healthy, it's more likely the rest of us will be, too, and if one part of us is ailing, the

rest of us is apt to be ailing, too. This is why we offer a healing service with anointing, laying on of hands, and Holy Communion. In the letter of James we read:

¹⁴ Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up, and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. (James 5:14-15)

There's the soul/body connection!

It's such a puzzlement that the townspeople **beg** Jesus to leave the neighborhood, when He has just made someone who was broken whole. Why? It seems like it's too much for them: they reject what they do not understand. May the Holy Spirit prevent **us** from automatically rejecting what we do not understand! God is always doing a brand new thing, so there is always lots of newness afoot and we shouldn't stomp on it. The townspeople **beg** Jesus to leave, ASAP, and the man he's healed **begs** to go with Him. (How do you move back quietly when the neighbors have seen you naked and out of your mind?? The same neighbors who **chained** you and drove you out of town?) Jesus has said **yes** to the demons who asked to be sent into a herd of pigs, **yes** to the folks who have asked Him to vacate the premises, but **no** to the man He's healed, the man who wants to follow Him anywhere. Go figure. It's hard predicting what job, what ministry, the Lord will assign to us. To this man He says, *"Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you."* (Luke 8:39) The man who once called himself Mob obeys Jesus. Jesus commands us to do the same thing: *"Return to your home [school or office, playing field or gym, yacht club, soup kitchen, neighborhood], and declare how much God has done for you."* May the Holy Spirit grant us courage to do that, daily. Amen

¹*New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), p. 188.

