

Fourth Weds in Lent, Year B: Gerasene Demoniac
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When I was a very new pastor learning to preach, I collected a group of people to give me feedback. And one sermon I said a few things I thought were quite hilarious - many people were laughing out loud and others were smirking. But one of my elders sat straight and serious, like a Lutheran. Norwegian Lutheran, probably. So afterwards I asked him, did you think that was funny? And he said, well. I was taught never to laugh at the pastor. (I quite admired his self control.)

I know, we are here because we all take Jesus seriously and we want to learn from him. Which is a wonderful thing. But what if, he wasn't entirely serious that day? Then what do we do?

A reading from the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Mark [5:1-20] - [with thanks to Ben and Carey, who're helping me.]

[The disciples and Jesus] came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when [Jesus] had stepped out of the boat,
immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him.
The man *lived* among the tombs;

and no one could restrain him any more, [*growl*]¹
even with a chain; [*louder growl, rattle chains*]
for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains,
but the chains he wrenched apart,
and the shackles he broke in pieces;

and no one had the strength to subdue him.
Night and day among the tombs
and on the mountains
he was always howling [*yowl*]
and bruising himself with stones. [*no ideas?*]

When he saw Jesus from a distance,
he ran and bowed down before him;

¹ Adding noises was the idea of Douglas Adams, *The Prostitute and the Family Tree: Discovering Humor and Irony in the Bible*, p 68-9.

and he *shouted* at the top of his voice,
'What have you to do with me, Jesus,
Son of the Most High God?
I adjure you by God, do not torment me.'

For [Jesus] had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!'

Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'

He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.'

He begged [Jesus] earnestly not to send them out of the country.

Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; [*oink, oink*]
and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.'
So [Jesus] gave them permission.

And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; [*oink, oink, oink*]
and the herd, numbering about two thousand,
rushed down the steep bank into the lake, [*splash, splash*]
and were drowned in the lake. [*blub, blub, blub*]

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country.
Then people came to see what it was that had happened.
They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there,
clothed and in his right mind,
the very man who had had the legion;
and they were afraid.

Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac
and to the swine reported it.
Then they began to beg Jesus
to leave their neighborhood.

As he was getting into the boat,
the man who *had been* possessed by demons begged him that he might be
with him.

But Jesus refused,
and said to him, 'Go home to your friends,
and tell them
how much the Lord has done for you,
and what mercy he has shown you.'

And he went away
and began to proclaim *in the Decapolis* how much Jesus had done for him;
and everyone was amazed."

The Gospel of our Lord

It's kind of a long story, and we only have time for a short sermon.

One interesting fact about this story is, it's not in the Sunday cycle of readings we call the lectionary. We just have it here in Lent.

Now maybe the holiest of us won't like the fact that I think it's funny - you're in good company with Matthew. According to Matthew, there were twice as many healings and only half as many pigs.²

But if you accept with me, that all those noises lend themselves to being silly. Which is not actually my idea. I've been reading this Douglas Adams book about humor in the Bible.

But anyway, why is Jesus telling a story that's so silly?

Remember that theme, they gave us?

"In Community with People on the Margins."

We all have people we don't like too much. And sometimes groups of people don't like other groups of people.

It's hard to get them to listen to each other. So possibly, just possibly, Jesus is telling this story to keep us listening for a point we 'd dismiss if he told us directly.

Anyway, jokes aren't funny if you explain them.

And maybe Jesus wasn't being funny. Maybe his tone was ... more like a horror story?

² Matthew 8:28-34

And *these* people who lived on the other side of the lake (the Sea of Galilee... it's kind of a big lake). They were across a *border*, in what's now Jordan, the Golan Heights.

So they were foreigners.

And that the main character. That's the scary part.

Self harm. Living in a graveyard.

Not a cheerful graveyard, like ours in Reedsburg ... or the one in your town.



But night and day among the tombs.

Was he suicidal, do you think?

Chains couldn't hold him.

Shackles.

Nobody was strong enough. Why did they need to be strong enough?

So he was hurting himself. Not cutting, but using stones.

[Do you feel sorry for him? I'm starting to feel *sorry* for him, even if he is a foreigner. and had a mental illness and was so *dangerous* they tried to lock him up.]

"Jesus, Son of the Most High God."

He knew about him. [tap head]

Read Mark. All the demons know Jesus' name. They all know about Jesus.

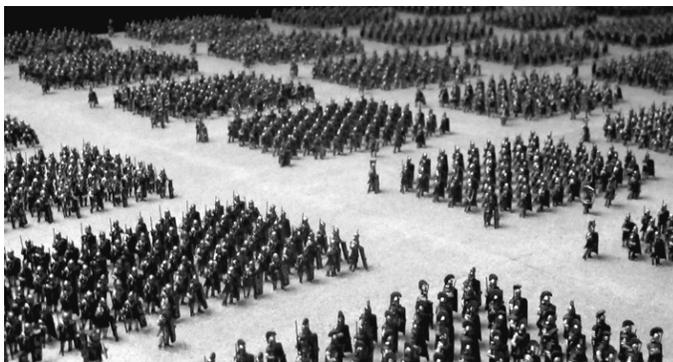
So Jesus goes, "hi, I'm Jesus, what's your name?"

LEGION (creepy voice)

So the demon was calling himself, a soldier...



But not one soldier, 6000 of them.



'cause that's what Legion meant, 6000 Roman soldiers.

Yikes. An ARMY of demons.

I'm not joking - maybe Jesus was telling a horror story.

Then what about those pigs?

Do you think he *meant* to move from the soldiers to pigs? (That's what Doug Adams wrote.)

YIKES! What about "thank you for your service?"

And the poor farmers. Two thousand sounds like a factory farm. *I think.*

Do you think God doesn't *like* pigs?



Although, there were all those old Testament warnings,



about not eating rib roasts and pork chops and bacon.

So God's people, who took all of that seriously, were keeping a good distance.

Imagine Lent, then!! (remove slide)

I really liked the part where Jesus healed the person. And found clothes somewhere. (Where would there be clothes in a graveyard?)

But there he was sitting; in his right mind.

You don't need any pictures. We've all *seen* people like that. Sitting, clothed, in their right mind.

But you know, I liked that part and I felt grateful. The demons were gone. If he had a mental illness he was better. If he was cold living outside like a homeless person he was better. He wasn't hurting himself any more. I felt. Relieved.

And of course the people who watched all this.

And the people who heard about it.

The people who *knew* him.

What did they feel? [pause] (They were AFRAID.)

What would you say, if you had watched all that?

Jesus, can you stay and help us a while. We have people here with the virus. People with depressions. People who are sad. I know you're busy but, would you please stay and help us? We can set up a clinic.

No, *they said* would you please take off? *Now!* they said.

Some people writing about the Bible think, they were feeding their families raising those pigs. That's certainly possible. And I can see why that would make them angry.

But why didn't they build Jesus a clinic? Say people only. Hire some Nurses to help?³

So he started to leave, and of course the man said, can I *come with you please*?

But *Jesus* is not finished. With whatever he's doing: "No. Go and tell your friends."

I want to know.

What friends?

the people who took care of him?

the ones who shackled him? [*P shake shackles*]

the ones who chained him?

What *friends* is Jesus talking about? There were no friends, in this story.

But he was grateful.

He had.... faith.

Amen.

Don't you think? That's the point?

However. Instead of going back home and telling his friends, the man went *away* and told his story in town. The Decapolis, that's actually the center of *ten* towns. So what power did Jesus have? because actually, the man did the *opposite* of what Jesus said.⁴

He did tell the story about his faith. About what Jesus did for him..

³ The Prostitute and the Family Tree, p 66.

⁴ *ibid*, 67.

In the wrong place. To the wrong people.

So... Amen (laugh)