**Luke 8:26-39** June 19, 2022

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*Luke 8:26They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. 27When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. 28When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” 29For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.*

*30Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. 31And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.*

*32A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. 33When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.*

*34When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, 35and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 36Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. 37Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.*

*38The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.*

**Jesus Doesn’t Look Away!**

So, when you are in the chair to donate blood, and the nurse is about to stick you with that extra fat needle they use for blood donations, what does she tell you? She says, “You might want to look away.” Do you? Most of us do. Some people health professionals might not. I’m not sure what’s wrong with them. Not the rest of us. Me? After donating blood several times, I thought I was up to watching the procedure. Nope. Even though I knew exactly what to expect, and that other than an initial bit pain nothing bad would happen, and that by going through this procedure I was potentially saving somebody’s life—totally irrationally, watching that needle puncture my skin made me go pale, and the nurse asked, “Are you alright?” After that, I looked away every time.

What icky things that make you look away? It’s different things for different people. Some can’t stand the sight of blood. For others, they feel a need to look away when brought face-to-face with the helpless, sometimes demented, chaos of a homeless person’s life—they just can’t deal with it. Another might have this insistent urge to turn away from tattoos and piercings. Others can’t stand the thought of changing a diaper, on an adult. I don’t say that to be gross or funny (it’s not), but to point out we all have things that we ought, as decent human beings, to be able to deal with—but we can’t.

Of course, we like to imagine that we aren’t like that. “I don’t look away!” Like me that one time when donating blood, you like to imagine that you are strong enough. You fool yourself into thinking that you are more virtuous than others. Or maybe you *are* one of the few who doesn’t look away. If so, don’t look down on other people who can’t help it. Many people, especially Christians, are aware they shouldn’t look away. They don’t want to. They try not to. They fight it. It just happens. You’ve known people haunted by that. People haunted by a moment of paralysis when they knew they should have acted. Be charitable to decent people who do look away. You don’t know what has happened in their past. You don’t know their psychological makeup. Don’t forget the many other ways that they are indeed generous, helpful, kind, joyful people. The most appropriate response to moments of weakness is mercy.

**1)** Whether or not we turn away in any given situation, there is one who never looked away. He never has and never will falter at the doorstep of human suffering or even depravity. Let’s hear about him, our Savior Jesus Christ.

From what we can piece together from the larger Gospel narrative, it seems that our reading happened, interestingly enough, in the twilight of a dying day. The boat carrying Jesus and his disciples landed five or six miles from Capernaum where their voyage started. For the twelve in the boat with Jesus, how welcome the sound of waves gently lapping the shore! They had just been in a storm that these experienced fisherman thought would be their last. Then Jesus told it to shut up. It had! How welcome the bright evening star, and other points of light popping out of the deep navy blue sky above! It was a divinely mandated calm *after* the storm.

On this tranquil evening, no sooner did Jesus’ foot step ashore than ***“he was met by a demon-possessed man.”*** “Teacher, get back into the boat!” I can imagine a disciple shouting. The intruder looked the part of a demon possessed man! ***“For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.”*** When they crossed the lake, Jesus and his disciples had entered non-Jewish lands. What a way to be welcomed! Wouldn’t that just confirm the worst of all you had imagined about these foreigners? The first one you meet is unclothed and demon possessed. Wouldn’t you have every excuse to beat a hasty retreat, sail away, never come back, and to tell all your neighbors?

Not Jesus. Jesus refused to look away.

**2)** Before we think about how Jesus refused to look away from this man, it is good to briefly appreciate something else.

***“When [the demon possessed man] saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, ‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?’”***

First of all, this man is not merely mentally disturbed. His knowledge of Jesus, and his ensuing conversation with Jesus tell us that this is not mere mental illness. It is indeed a demon dwelling in him.

Now, all kinds of questions are popping into our minds. Sadly, we don’t have time to get into them all. There are a couple things that might be good to review. Evil spirits are sometimes called demons or evil angels—are all one and the same. Satan, or, the devil, is chief among them. They do have the ability to take up residence, to “possess” a human being, though in most times and places this is fairly uncommon. As elsewhere, the Bible here speaks of multiple demons taking up residence in a single person. Evil spirits are spiritual beings. They were originally created as angels. Shortly after creation, through their own willfulness, they rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven. God has condemned all evil spirits so that at the end of time they will be thrown into the fires of hell. That’s what the demons of this reading were hoping wasn’t happening. Knowing who Jesus was, they were afraid that he had come to sentence them to hell before the appointed time.

But back to the shores of Galilee. In situations of extreme stress, something called the “fight or flight” instinct kicks in. It’s the survival instinct that tells you you either have to fight a danger with all your being, or to run away as fast as you can. Jesus does neither.

Jesus is in control, total control, every second. The crowd of demons in this man could do no more than fall at Jesus’ feet and acclaim him as ***“Jesus, Son of the Most High God.”*** Yes, even these demons had to acknowledge Jesus. I guess Christians are on the right side, right?! Before Jesus, these evil spirits who had tormented this man could do no more than say, ***“I beg you”***—did you hear that?—***"I beg you, don’t torture me!”*** And with that Jesus wrenched them out of that man.

Dear Christians, remember that your Savior is powerful to protect you. As the Good Book says elsewhere, *“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons…will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38-39).

**3)** But back to the main point. Even as that unclothed, frightening man charged at Jesus, Jesus never looked away. Jesus saw the demons, the many demons, dozens, maybe hundreds, maybe even thousands of demons torturing this man. And Jesus saw the man. He never lost sight of the man. And he loved him. How could Jesus? Demon possessed, naked, on the ground, frightening to any who saw him, a monster? Do you think that man, if he were able to think along these lines, do you think he felt lovable?

Jesus looked at him and saw all of humanity. In this man he saw what all of us are by nature. His ugly, desperate situation is the ugly, desperate situation we are all in from birth. Yet Jesus never looked away.

It is natural for us, when we know the worst about ourselves, to want to go hide in a hole from the world, and to wonder if God can possibly love us. Martin Luther, for the first 30 years of his life, was only taught about God’s hatred of sin, and the certainty of God’s judgment. So he, well aware of so many of his sins, would spend hours in confession to his father confessor, trying somehow to appease God. On at least occasion he spent six hours in the confessional. He wondered how God could ever stand to look at him, to accept him, to love him. (https://en.wikipedia. org/wiki/Johann\_von\_Staupitz)

Luther at that point in his life had not been told the other thing the Bible tells us about Jesus. He had not been told how Jesus loved all people so much that he was willing to suffer not only death, but hell, for us. In his pain and agony on the cross, his heavenly Father refused to look at him. By that payment for our sin, God *does* now look on us with favor.

Yet, humility before God is good, because without humility, no one can ever be reconciled before God. All who came to Jesus confident in their behavior before God were shown the door. Not that Jesus stopped looking at them, but he could only look at them with sadness, sometimes even a tear.

We need a humility that realizes our unworthiness before God. We need a humility that is conscious of our regular sin against God in thought, word and deed. And then we need to know also about Jesus, who wants all to be saved. He made the payment for the sins (all the sins) of sinners (all sinners). People who came to Jesus in that spirit were received by Jesus and told, *“Your sins are forgiven.”*

Not only our sins, but also our inadequacies can make us feel unacceptable to Jesus. Now, sometimes sins and inadequacies are the same thing. I don’t think there is a dark line separating the two. But it can be helpful to make a distinction. Often, “inadequacies” haunt us more than the sins. There was no intention to do wrong. In fact, there maybe was nothing done wrong. But in the end, our choices led to bad outcomes, great sorrow, or personal conflict. I speak here as a father to other fathers. You know what I’m talking about. Sometimes you wish things had been different: a little more time here, some more interest shown there, a word of guidance that could have saved a lot of grief. Was it a sin? Some, yes. Some, no. Much, I really don’t know. But it’s on you, and it’s not where you wanted to be.

And there are inadequacies at the job, or in social circles, and more.

In all these different places sin and inadequacies make us feel unworthy of a glance from Jesus.

Let me tell you something: if Jesus on a beach in the starlight, his horrified disciples grabbing the oars as the only weapons at hand, if Jesus looked at this groveling, shamed, outcast of a man refused to look away, know that he will never do otherwise for you. His caring eye never left you. This man experienced it. And so in the morning light, people found him sitting at the feet of Jesus, learning from him. No wonder that after this encounter, he ***“went away and told all over the town how much Jesus had done for him.”***

I imagine there are many opinions about our new hymnal. Go ahead and share yours with me. I have one to share: When I hear the music and read the words of some of these new hymns, I have literally thought, “Wow! I get to sing this? I thought I’d have to wait till heaven for a song like that.” Hymn 311, “Dawning Light of Our Salvation” is one of those.

You who are members, who have been instructed in God’s Word and pledged yourself to what the Bible says, will shortly step forward to receive Holy Communion. During that blessing of Communion we will be singing hymn 311. As you sing that distribution hymn, ponder not only the mystery of the Sacrament, Jesus’ physical presence there for you, but also Jesus on that lakeshore refusing to turn aside from anyone. Revel in singing those words which rejoice in acceptance:

*Stand, O lame, and dance, ye broken; know the Savior’s healing grace.  
Come, O deaf, and hear him singing; turn, O blind, behold his face!*

Jesus doesn’t look away. Amen.