

Lenten Devotional March 2, 2024

Scripture

Mark 5:1-20

1 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. 2 And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. 3 He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; 4 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. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. 6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; 7 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." 8 For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" 9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." 10 He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. 11 Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; 12 and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." 13 So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

14 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. 15 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. 16 Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. 17 Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. 18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 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." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Devotion

The Rev. Darryl Lockie '17

To be frank, today's Gospel reading is bizarre. It's bizarre even by the Gospels' standards, which is a rather high bar. Indeed, if a friend told you this same story over a beer, you'd suggest he close his tab and go home. "You just wouldn't believe it, man," he tells you with a slight slur. "So we get right off the boat, right? Then this crazy guy comes up and starts screaming at us. Oh, there was this hoard of pigs. Did I tell you about the pigs yet?" It's at this moment you half expect him to fall off his barstool and pass out.

The central message of this passage is of course, the authority of Jesus, the power of God. But perhaps something not to be lost here is the way God works in both the chaos and utter ridiculousness of life. If this is the messiah of the unexpected, we might expect to find him in, well, the unexpected. He is to be found working not just among the staid and the stoic, but also the eccentric and the idiosyncratic. We all likely know this, but this story is a good reminder.

Perhaps it gives us pause to actually say hello to the woman caught in spirited conversation with herself in the park. Or maybe we reach out to the odd man at our church who owns a small herd of cats and has the odor to prove it. As opposed to always trying to turn away from the bizarre, possibly we look for the

divine in it. According to this story, Jesus works there. Some thoughts to consider as we make our way through this strange and reflective season of Lent.

Prayer

Dear Lord, this Lenten season, please give me fresh eyes to see your Spirit at work. Help me to see you bringing freedom where there is oppression, and hope amidst desperation. God, life is so often messy and downright ridiculous. Yet, give me wisdom to see you working through such circumstances, and also, conviction so I too might share your message of hope and light. Amen.