



Grace Lutheran Church
June 19, 2022: 2nd Sunday after Pentecost
“Demons in Your Family?” [Luke 8:26-39](#)

Do you have a demon in your family? Someone who challenges tradition, who confounds expectations, who creates chaos for reasons that others cannot fathom? Or do you consider yourself the black sheep of your family, refusing to

toe the party line, marching to your own drum, and as a result cast out by your kin? And has this rejection kept your family locked in division—those who support you, those who condemn you--even when love is spread right at their feet?

Long ago, the city of Gadara on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee was burdened, and then gifted, by one such family member.

Let me take you there, because I once took a guided tour of that region during which we met this strange and wonderful man.

The Gospel of the Lord according to Luke the 8th Chapter.
Glory to you, O Lord.

After a bumpy side we touched down on the far shore of the sea of Galilee. As we disembarked, we drank in the lake breeze and admired the rolling hills spread before us. A large herd of pigs covered one entire hillside, well-tended by their swineherds. Scanning the scene we then spied a cemetery nestled between the hills, and to our alarm, a naked figure running wildly from grave to grave, waving his arms. The wind carried the sound of his unearthly howling, which sent shivers up and down our spine.

Our tour guide assured us that we would be keeping our distance. She told us that this was once the beloved town blacksmith who had lost his mind in grief after his wife died. Day and night he screamed for her. The town council, afraid for their own safety, ordered him to be chained in the city jail, ironically in shackles he himself had fashioned. But the sheer force of his despair was so great that he kept bursting out and running for the cemetery, howling his dead wife’s name. He would sleep in the tombs by day and run from grave to grave by night until the townspeople managed to recapture him, and then the cycle would start all over again.

Our guide told us Gadara used to be a popular tourist destination, but with this going on tourism had almost completely collapsed. The city’s entire livelihood was now wrapped up in that large herd of swine. Plus, she said, there was a lot of controversy over the way the man was being treated. Those who remembered him fondly thought it was an outrage that the town council kept him chained up instead of getting him the help he needed.



Puzzling over all this, we then saw a boat pull up short distance down the shoreline. A frazzled looking band of men cowered in the rear while a white robed figure stood confidently in front. Our startled guide whispered that this was Jesus, the great healer and miracle worker who had been stirring up crowds all across the region.

We watched closely as he stepped onto the shore. At almost the same instant the crazed man turned and ran headlong toward him, waving his arms wildly. They had some kind of interaction we couldn't hear, but what we saw next shook us to the core: The massive herd of swine, maybe 2,000 all told, suddenly jerked, as if wrenched by an earthquake, and began to stampede down the hillside toward the lake. The swineherds screamed behind them to stop, but to our horror they tore into the water at full speed. In a matter of seconds, the entire herd had been drowned.

Before we could take in this horrendous scene, our guide quickly turned us away and ushered us back onto the bus. The epic scale of this disaster became apparent when we arrived in Gadara. The town was in an uproar because their fragile economy was now in a shambles—and all because of some foreigner in white robe who had dared to step onto their shore.

Where is he now, we asked? “We sent him back where he came from,” they grumbled. “Today's troubles are enough for today.”

With heavy hearts we headed for the next stop on our itinerary, discussing and wondering what had happened to the poor blacksmith. Last we saw he was crumpled in a heap at Jesus' feet before our guide whisked us away.

A couple of weeks later our itinerary took us back through Gadara. We had time to grab lunch and take a short walk. As we turned the corner from our the café, the most amazing sight greeted us: The blacksmith, this very same man, fully clothed, was sitting on a stump and talking animatedly to a small group that had gathered around him.

We joined the circle and listened in. His eyes sparkled as he told about the very experience we had witnessed—how grief over the death of his wife had driven him mad for years, and then how, after being treated worse than an animal by the very people he once served, only Jesus had spoken to him as one human being to another. “He spoke to me as if he knew everything about me,” the man said. “I felt completely wrapped in love. Suddenly I realized was wearing clothes. I felt like myself again. Life and hope were pouring into me as if I had been reborn. His love gave me new life, and it will give you new life, too.”

People around him began peppering him with questions and we joined in. “Why didn't you just go with Jesus?” we wanted to know. “Usually people drop everything to follow him. Why didn't you?”

“I wanted to,” he said. “Believe me, that would have been so much easier. I wanted to put this whole place behind me, all the trauma of those years, the horrible way they treated me, plus I knew that people here would never welcome me back. My cure cost them their living, and I knew

they'd never forgive me for that. I wanted to go with him. But Jesus told me, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you."

"So things are going well?" we asked the man. "Hardly," he said with a sigh. "My friends, all the people I cared for through my business for all those years, still don't want to have anything to do with me. They blame my healing for all their problems. 'We could handle you when you were out of your mind,' they are telling me. 'At least we had food on the table. Now we have no idea how we are going to manage. You have ruined this town.'"

"But what about these folks?" we said, motioning toward the circle around him. "Oh, this is a group that came up from Philadelphia," he said. "They love me like a brother. They love me for who I am. And they can't stop asking about Jesus."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Lord.

Fear is the most powerful weapon in the devil's arsenal – not rational fear, which protects us from danger, but manufactured fear based on falsehood and misunderstanding whose only purpose is to distance and divide. This kind of fear petrifies the heart, paralyzes the soul, and rips us apart as a community while tempting us to doubt the very goodness of God.



Jesus comes to challenge and cast out every power that keeps us from living fully and freely as God desires. Why would you say no to being freed from bondage to fear? What selfish conceit are you protecting? It's as all 16 Chance cards in Monopoly are Get Out of Jail Free cards, instead of just one. Your chance of getting out is 100%, not just 6%.

So come out! For the sake of the world God so loves, come out! Come out, so that you can go out. So that you can go out -- and declare how much God has done for you.

Amen.