
Jesus is Highly Challenging

Sermon • Marco Bischler • 22 June 2025

Luke 8:26-39

Today's gospel reading has a challenging story ready for us. And in the same fashion I want to extend some challenge to us all this morning. So this is your official disclaimer that some things I will say today, might challenge you to change your life.

So, story time. Jesus travels to the east side of Sea of Galilee with his friends with the goal of reaching the near town of Gersa to preach there. And then we see Jesus dealing with demons and driving them out of this man. Jesus goes easy on the demons and terrified by their herd of pigs running off a cliff, the pig herdsman ran back to the city of Gersa and told everyone what had happened. This wasn't exactly Good News for Gersa and soon Jesus was asked to leave. The man that was but no longer is possessed by demons asked to come with him, but Jesus told him no and gave him a calling.

In our other reading, from Galatians 3, Paul talks about how we were all captives of the law before Christ came and brought us faith. With faith and our baptism we are now putting on Christ and are no longer captives of the law, but now welcomed into God's own family and called children of God. How wonderful! But how do these two stories align?

In one story we have a man captive by demons, where in the other we have ourselves, captives by the law. The man in the gospel did the only reasonable thing when possessed and approached Jesus and fell to his knees before him. So if we apply that to our situation then our only move is to come to Christ. When we realise that the law is too much, when we reach that point in reflection where we agree with the bible that we are not it, that we in fact need help and that we aren't perfect; when we get to that point in our life, then the only reasonable thing to do is to approach Christ, fall to our knees and surrender. We have nothing to bring, so the only thing we can do is to beg for mercy.

And while Jesus being in the town of Gersa isn't Good News for them in the first instance, I can assure you that it is for you today! Jesus has so much grace about him that even demons are spared from their worst nightmare.

Now - theological sidetone - that is not to say, that the demons are saved or forgiven or anything like that. Actually, the word for abyss used in the greek

bible implies that the abyss is a cold, wet and dark place. And so with Jesus basically giving them the freedom to choose what to do with the pigs, the demons choose mischief and evil, because that's who they are. So in the end they still get what they deserve and end up in the ocean, a cold, wet and dark place. Theological side note done.

Back to why Jesus' grace is actually Good News. The demons sort of were given a second chance but didn't make good use of it. If we use the parallel of that story and think about us being captives by the law, then we realise that we are also given a second chance. Jesus takes away the weight of the law, just like he took away the demons, and raises us up to make the most of our second chance. We are in fact given a second chance and the possibility of a new life in him through faith, so that we can actually cash in on that second chance.

Much like the demons, we are free to choose what to do with our second chance. But unlike the demons Jesus offers us a way to not mess it up again. He gives us faith and the Holy Spirit in baptism so that we may be introduced into his body, we are called children of God now and we put on Christ and his righteousness. All that Christianese basically means one thing: we are free to choose. We are free to choose on what to do about it!

Yes, we are children of God. Yes, we are made free by the sacrifice Jesus made. And yes, that is absolutely awesome for us. BUT what do we choose to do about it? See, it is very easy to just sit back, relax and enjoy christian life. It is cosy to be in church community, it is easy to come to church every Sunday and worship God with likeminded people and hopefully people that we actually like and will become somewhat of a second family to us. This is all very important, don't get me wrong, but it is also two other things: it is 1 very easy, and 2 also not the whole picture.

Let's look at how the life of this man in our gospel reading changed after being given a second chance by Jesus. He does the one thing that we all should do. He asks Jesus, if he could join him and go back over to the other side of the lake and be a disciple. That's what we can do. We can ask Jesus to let us follow him, give up our life and join him in the journey that he is on. This is what the Jesus means when he says: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." So this is your invitation to do exactly that. Make the choice to follow Jesus and give up your life, pick up his cross and follow Jesus.

And this is not a "once in a lifetime" thing. We as Christians that exactly know how this all goes have to do the very same thing over and over again. How often do we approach Jesus realising that we have failed, that we are essentially in need of Jesus to take away the weight of the law over and over again. So this morning I challenge you to look inward and identify where you might need to go back to Jesus and ask him for his healing grace.

But what was Jesus' answer to this man asking him to join Jesus on his journey back over the lake? Jesus said "No." He essentially had one thing to say to him and it was "Go back home and tell everyone what I did for you." That is as easy as it is challenging. Now this man had not lived in the town for a while and was probably known as the local weird man, demon-possessed guy or whatever names they came up with and the calling Jesus bestows onto this man is to go back to them to tell them about Jesus.

Jesus sets this man free from what was tormenting him for God knows how long. He gives him all he could ever ask for and more and then sends him off with a responsibility. It would've been easy for this man to go with Jesus and be all "My Jesus and me" and go be happy. It really would've been easy and our society tells us that that is absolutely awesome for *that guy*. You go do what is best for you and be happy.

But with Jesus the story goes slightly differently. See, when Jesus gives us faith, grace, his righteousness and all the good things the bible talks about, then he never gives us those things to keep to ourselves. For the comic fans here, I keep hearing Uncle Ben's advice to young Peter Parker: "With great power comes great responsibility." And it is true. Now while Uncle Ben is talking to a supernatural, superpower'd and (might I add fictitious) Spiderman, Jesus is essentially saying the same thing to us:

Jesus has given the demon-possessed man everything not for him to enjoy by himself, but to go into a world that doesn't like Jesus, that doesn't even really like the man either and in fact the bible tells us that the people were scared of Jesus and share his story. And in just the same way, Jesus gives you and me everything and more so we can go out into this world to talk about what he did for us, what he offered and the Good News he brings, even though people think they don't want it.

So, as we think about the man that was freed from demons by Jesus and what it did to his life, let us reflect on what Jesus has done for us, how it changes our life and how we can step into the responsibility Jesus has bestowed onto you and me. Jesus didn't save me to play happy family with him, he saved me to be a tool in spreading the Good News into a hostile world with him. How could that look today or this week?

Amen.