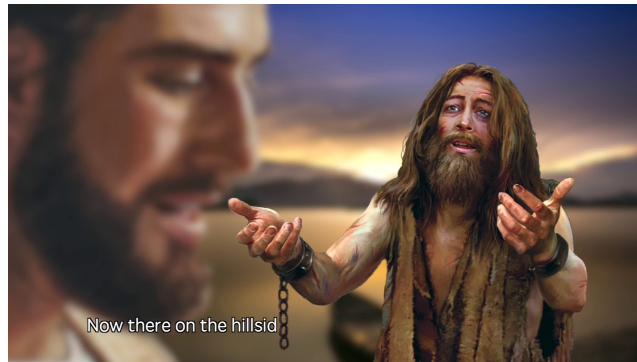

Jesus heals the Gerasene Demoniac

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 22th June

Isaiah 61:1-2a • Luke 8:26-39



I'm going to read the passage starting at vs 22 and directly before the story we are looking at this morning because the stories are very much linked together and understanding something of what Jesus did as he was crossing the lake will help us better understand what Jesus did when landing on the other side.

Prayer: Loving God speak to us through your Word. Help us to see the encouragement it contains. May it shape the way we think, and the way we live, Amen.

As you heard that reading I dare say you have some questions. Do such a things happen? Is this really a case of supernatural oppression, or simply mislabeled mental instability? Another question might be, "it's all well and good Jesus dealing with such a thing, but how would I cope?"

In my news sheet reflection I've included a couple of the NT perspectives that help us remember that we are in a spiritual battle. But we are not to panic or fear, because it's not an equal battle, as shown in the story we look at today.

The main thing I want to do this morning is show how this story proves one of the key truths and encouragements in the gospel. It's this. No matter the circumstances, no matter how bleak things look, things can change for the better. That is as long as Jesus is a part of the solution.

We heard from Isa 61 a couple vs that Jesus claims are pointing to him and his ministry.

- Jesus is Good news for the poor.
- Release for the captives.
- Sight for the blind.
- He is the one who will let the oppressed go free.

We would be hard pressed to find a more dramatic example of the oppressed being freed, than we find in our story this morning.

A man described as a demoniac becomes a disciple. So if we are tempted to think some situations are impossible to fix, I hope this story could encourage us to think differently.

Before we look at this story, let's note a few things to help navigate us through this passage.

First, this is an unusual and dramatic situation. Yes, Jesus often dealt with oppressive supernatural forces, but of all of them, this is the most dramatic. **Second**, dramatic power encounters between the forces of good and evil, tend to happen as the gospel is crossing boundary's and advancing into new territory.

That's what's happening here. Jesus and his disciples have just crossed the lake from the Jewish area to one largely populated by Gentiles and a little south are 10 Roman outpost cities, the Decapolis. When they land in this new territory with the gospel it's a full on power contest.

Even the story of the crossing of the lake has a hint that there is more going on than meets the eye. Jesus is sleeping peacefully while his disciples are panicking. They are in fear of their lives, given the sudden storm that is threatening to sink the boat.

Such storms were not uncommon for that area. But in the text you get a hint that all is not as it seems. There may even be forces at work trying to stop Jesus getting to the new territory.

Here's a possible clue. As Jesus rebukes and calms the storm, the language he uses is the language of deliverance, as when he rebuked and commands evil spirits to silence.

At the very least Jesus is showing his authority over the forces of nature. His disciples are left asking "who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?" It could even be that Jesus is also showing his authority over the forces of the enemy, that could well have something to do with this storm.

Remember Job. The enemy appeared before God and got permission to afflict Job within certain limits. Down the list of calamities that hit Job, bang bang bang in quick succession is this one where he gets the report.

“Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house, and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you.”

Did the enemy have a hand in that great wind? Maybe. The enemy was certainly controlling various situations as calamity after calamity struck Job.

- Whatever the cause of the storm, Jesus got them through it.
- Whatever the opposition, Jesus got them to the other side.
- What ever happened at the other side, Jesus was able to deal with it.

Jesus showed he was in control in the boat, and when the boat landed to be met by this demonised man. I dare say the disciples may well have been panicking again for a bit till Jesus sorted the situation.

Thirdly, a balanced understanding is important when looking into things such as this. It pays not to underestimate, or overestimate, the opposition when it comes to advancing the gospels.

Don’t underestimate the opposition. Yes we face a powerful foe. The prince of this world. **But don’t overestimate the opposition.** Jesus said “I will build my church and the very gates of hell will not prevail against it”. So whatever the opposition, whatever the challenge, the enemy was defeated at the cross. It’s important we understand its not an equal battle. Jesus has already won, even though it doesn’t look like it at times.

As we take some encouragements and get some perspectives from the story, we note:

- Such events are not the norm.
- They tend to happen as the Gospel is advancing into new territory. That is still the case today.
- Further, this is not an even match. Jesus has already won the battle.

I’ve spent a bit of time drawing some parameters around what we are looking at today because people can sometimes fall into either of two extremes when dealing with supernatural forces. Denying its reality. Or being so obsessed or frightened of it, that the focus on Jesus is lost.

That said from the passage, 2 encouragements, 1 warning and 1 practical application when it comes to sharing our hope and faith.

The encouragements.

Firstly, No one is beyond the point of getting close to Jesus.

If we are tempted to write someone off, what about this man described in vs 26-28. A madman. Supernaturally strong. Isolated. Tormented. Self destructive. Living among the tomes. It's a picture of living death.

Now, we don't know why the man was there to meet Jesus. The forces within him, may well have wanted to scare Jesus and his disciples away. They certainly knew who Jesus was and they knew Jesus had the authority. What we know for sure is that when this poor tormented fellow got close to Jesus, and fell at his feet, it would prove life changing.

I absolutely believe that as long as there is breath in our lungs there is a hope that we might respond to Jesus and what he offers.

Secondly, and flowing from the fact that no one is beyond the possibility of getting close to Jesus.

Secondly, there is no situation or person bad enough that Jesus can't or won't help if we are willing to give him control.

With Jesus there is always hope. As the various Gospel writers give us details of the story it's fair to say this man's existence was a close to a living death as you could imagine. Even where he lives reinforces that. Among the tombs.

It's extreme. It's dramatic. It's making a point. If Jesus can set this man free, there is hope for anyone.

Sometimes when people look at the story they get worried by what happens to the pigs. Let's remember they were not being breed as pets. Their future was the pot. Maybe Jesus allowed the request of the demonic forces to show just how destructive these forces really were. And to stop them making anyone else's life a misery.

That must have outweighed the economic cost because I'm sure Jesus was not against Pig farmers and annoying a bunch of Gentile businessmen would hardly be a helpful evangelistic strategy.

The encouragements.

- Anyone can come to Jesus.
- There is no situation bad enough that Jesus can't deal with it.

The warning. Simply this. There are lots of things we don't understand when it comes to Jesus and the work of the Gospel, but best not get too worried or fearful about it.

The locals had a problem they couldn't solve. The guards, chains and shackles didn't work. Yes, Jesus solution had an economic cost. But did you notice, that that's not given as the reason the people were scared and begged Jesus to leave.

Verse 35-37 when people came out to see what had happened and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the Demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind and they were afraid.

Further on, "then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them for they were seized with great fear". No mention of the economic cost. Only the changed life. It would seem that however scared the people were of this poor tormented fellow, they were more fearful of the one who turned the situation around.

A demoniac, now a disciple, sitting at the feet of Jesus. This was outside their experience. They didn't understand it and they didn't like it.

It would seem even for Jesus followers fear and a lack of understanding is linked. They were afraid and amazed and asked "Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?"

The story ends with a great missional strategy. And with this I finish by way of application. The man, now in his right mind, begs to stay with Jesus. Somewhat surprisingly Jesus says no. He tells him return to his home and his friends. "Friends" is mentioned in the Mk account and points to the fact that this man must have once had a life that was quite different.

Our story in Luke ends with Jesus saying "Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

The pig farmers might not have been his greatest fans. But one thing for sure. All would have recognised the influence of Jesus on this man. That would have to be the key when it comes to sharing our faith.

What of us? None of us will have a story as dramatic and unusual as one that can be summed up as "from demoniac to disciple." But every follower of Jesus can say this. From sinner to saint. We can say that because "saint" is the natural NT way of addressing believers.

So to the saints at all saints. Pray that the gospel will influence and impact this community of Prebbleton. And, if the opportunity comes up, we can also talk about the difference Jesus has made in our life.

We might be a little fearful, but that aside, we can do it knowing that Jesus is in control, and he will already be working before we share.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you that there is always hope, and no one is beyond the reach of your love and transforming power, Amen.