

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, November 21, 2024

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God designed us to live in community. He knows healthy relationships will bless us. This week we study the healing miracles of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Not only does Jesus heal physical infirmity, He also frees people from places of isolation and restores them to community.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed and holy Lord, as a new day dawns I seek Your gracious presence. I quiet the busy chatter of my mind, still my body and rest in the goodness of Your love. Help me hear the message You have for me today. Thank You for the blessings of a life lived in community with others. I am grateful for my relationship with You and my relationships with family and friends. May the cornerstone of my life and our life together be Christ and Christ alone. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

When 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. When 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!" Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. When 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. When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and 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. Luke 8:27-28, 30, 33-35

REFLECTION

Jesus steps ashore in the country of the Gerasenes and encounters a demon-possessed man. The man is in dire circumstances. The man wears no clothes, and he has no home. He lives a tortured life among the tombs. This man's life is out of control, he lives in chaos. He is a danger to himself and a danger to others. He is routinely chained and shackled, but he breaks free. This man needs a Savior! Jesus goes out of his way to help him.

Whether the man suffers from demon-possession, unseen evil influences, a mental illness, schizophrenia, or remnants of some past traumatic event, the man cannot ask for help. But Jesus knows. Jesus crosses the sea to enter into the man's tortured isolation. He commands the demons to come out of him as soon as he sees him. Jesus sets foot on the land of the Gerasenes, calms the scene and brings order to the chaos of this man's life.

Like this man, many today suffer mental illness and psychological afflictions. Like this man, many today carry the remnants of past trauma in their lives that drives a hell of chaos within – past physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect or abandonment. The negative influences upon this

man were many. In the same way negative forces exert uncertainty and chaos in our lives. We feel the pressure of – jobs, money, relationships, health problems, family burdens. Voices swirl around us and attempt to identify us. Voices of the culture, voices of evil, voices of negative people in our lives, voices inside our own heads, negative self-talk, lies, voices that drive us to places of isolation, loneliness and despair.

The advent of social media means that we are more connected to other humans than we ever have been. Ironically, we are also more isolated than we ever have been and deep down we long for authentic community. Jesus Christ wishes to cross the sea of time and space and set foot on the soil of our lonely hearts to set us free from our inner turmoil to live in peace and fullness of life with Him.

The demon-possessed man is found sitting at Jesus' feet "dressed and in his right mind" (8:35). He is safe from harming himself. He is changed from his former condition. His dignity is restored. The man who did not live in a house (8:27), is to return to his house (8:39). He is "sitting at Jesus' feet" – the beginning of learning and discipleship. He is returned to community, sent back to the town and restored to society.

Returning to community is always the completion of healing and restoration. The text says this man was from the nearby town. Did he have family there? Did he have friends? How could they leave him out there alone? If he was so ill as to be a danger to himself and others, maybe they had no other way to cope? Although we have no clues from the text, I suspect there was someone, a loved one, a parent, a grandparent, someone who hated the situation, and who prayed for him. Someone was praying for him, and the Savior crossed the Sea! Now Jesus was sending him back home to his community - healed and whole.

Ask: Do I know someone who needs Jesus the Savior? Who could I be praying for this week?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for your determination to reach the lost, heal the broken and calm the chaos. Thank you for your willingness to cross time and space to save those who are trapped and helpless. You are the Good Shepherd who left the ninety-nine to save the one lost sheep. Come and find me in my places of lonely isolation. Pour Your steadfast love into the recesses of my heart and restore my soul. I devote myself to praying for those who I know desperately need Your help. I have faith in Your power to heal and restore. Amen.