

THE JESUS PEOPLE MET – LUKE 8:26-39 THE LORD OF THE SWINE

Well, this week, in our series The Jesus People Met, there are three groups who meet Jesus.

One - a man, or two men oppressed/possessed by demonic activity ...

Two - demons, a whole lot of them ...

Three - pigs, grazing on a hillside ...

Only one of those three has a good report to give, and lives to tell the tale ...

And I might pause to note that is a passage that has some apparent anomalies in it that we should be aware of.

Firstly, Matthew 8 and Mark 5 also record this encounter. All three gospel writers are referring to the same event and seem to be using the same source.

Matthew records the briefest amount of information of this event, where two disturbed men, demonically oppressed, are freed from that oppression by Jesus. Matthew doesn't include any further information about the men's response to Jesus after being healed.

Mark and Luke mention only one man demonically oppressed, and it seems entirely reasonable to understand that they do not disagree with Matthew about the number of men rather their interest is in focusing on the one man whose response is recorded.

Three other things to note:

- Where it took place is variously mentioned as the region of the Gerasenes, or Gadarenes. That's like saying it took place in the region of Hobart or Battery Point.
- Either way, it is not a region where Jewish faith and customs prevailed, hence the keeping of pigs (2000 or more).
- The man is said to be demonised. Demons are presented biblically as fallen angels. In the Old Testament the word often translated as false gods can also be translated demons. So, in Deut. 32:17 for example, Israel is criticized for making Yahweh angry by sacrificing to false gods, but most translations use the word "demons" consistent with

fallen angels. Both translations of the word are correct at the same time.

- I might also note that these spirits are not ancestral ghosts, although it is specifically noted that this man lives among the graves, and Roman religion would have made that link very strongly. Chinese culture would today as well.

I highlight all this because while there are variations in the account by different gospel writers, they are not discrepancies but rather differing emphases in the detail.

I think as we read this passage, we find it puzzling, and maybe a little disturbing.

Jesus has been doing great ministry within Israel, and crowds are following him, and many believe in him. After stilling a storm in the boat, they pull up on the other side of the lake, in gentile territory.

We can't be sure precisely today where the region of the Gadarenes/Gerasenes was. Scholars differ on where. But for the three synoptic gospels, while not specific enough for us today, clearly it was sufficient at the time.

1. The Demons that Jesus Met

This man is demented. He has almost no agency for himself. He suffers almost all the symptoms of demonic activity within him, including ferocious strength, a tormented spirit, isolation, nakedness, and self-harm.

And this man comes close to Jesus. We aren't told why. It may be that he has enough capacity to see Jesus and cry out to him seeking help.

Alternatively Jesus is in some way seeking him out, either way – the demons within him see danger. Shouting at the top of his voice, the demons say “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!”²⁹ For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man.

That this man knew who Jesus was points to some limited knowledge on the part of the demons within him. I have said in recent weeks that Satan and his

cohort have limited knowledge, limited powers, and limited presence in geographical terms.

But they know what their end will be one day – the abyss, they know who Jesus is, and know that this day all their worst fears are about to come to be. Scripture is crystal clear that God has set a day when the principalities and powers on heaven and earth opposed to him will meet the eternal comeuppance that Jesus has won on the cross by his death and resurrection.

The perversity of evil is it is destined for wrath and destruction on that day, and in meantime, in perverse denial, its determined to somehow escape the judgement that they is to come.

It's thought that because the demons know who Jesus is that in doing so they seek to exert authority over him, take the upper hand. But in this encounter with Jesus – it is Jesus who takes authority. Recognising him publicly in a way that Jesus may not have wished at this stage to declare himself, will not gain them any power or advantage. And it emerges that this man is tormented by many, many demons – a legion indeed.

And these demons, as with all evil, are cowed with fear. They stare their own destruction in the face and seek a way out.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.

2. The Jesus the Demons meet

That day we see a fearful encounter, where the satanic and demonic powers of hell cross paths with Jesus, and not just Jesus the Rabbi, but Jesus, Son of the Most High God.

I expect that demon possession, and multiple demons (thousands of them) are just a bit outside our comfort zone, and perhaps for some, our credibility zone.

So is this true? Isn't this demonic activity just an ancient superstitious response to what we would call severe mental health?

Well, In biblical times people were well aware of poor mental health. They could distinguish madness from demonic activity, although sometimes both were present at once.

King Saul who drove himself insane out of hatred for David and rebellion to God (1 Samuel 18)

Nebuchadnezzar was stricken with madness and loss of reason for a time by God for his pride (Daniel 4:31–34)

Jesus was wrongly accused of being insane: When Jesus' own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses." Mark 3:20ff

Paul was wrongly accused of being mad by Festus, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad." (Acts 26:24)

Paul says himself : For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. 2 Cor 5:13

My point being that the gospel accounts portray demonic activity, even control over people, as a reality that was different to mental health. That you might think we do not see it today here in Australia or Tasmania is a moot point.

I have no ability to judge that here. Many parts of the world today do see it more often. And all of us know well that evil in many forms exists in Australian life and culture.

As C. S. Lewis has commented, we ought not to either deny the power of satanic activity nor give it too much focus.

But what we can see here today in Luke is the all empowering capacity of Jesus to banish evil and demonic powers for ever.

So, why banish demons into pigs? Well its got our attention today hasn't it? I think the pig outcome has the same benefit as when Jesus heals the paralysed man who was lowered down through the roof.

That healing was an authentication of the power of Jesus to forgive sins.

Here - 2000 pigs self-destruct and show
the destructive nature of demonic existence
the self-destructive delusion of evil,
but also the awesome power of the living Saviour Jesus.

I think it worth taking pause at this point. This is not a sermon about demon possession per se, and it is probably a subject far from daily thought.

But the Bible is clear that we live within a world, a creation, in which evil exists, and in which spiritual non-physical beings exist that are evil too.

When Jesus died on the cross, he entered into the realm of those evil spiritual demonic powers, and defeated them once and forever.

Colossians 2: [15](#) And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross
In time and space we are to understand they still exist, but like the evil within us, their times are limited, and their end is certain.

The encounter on the lakeside with the legion of demons is our assurance that the Jesus they met on that day was the LORD Jesus Christ, who batted them away like pesky flies at a BBQ.

3. The Jesus who met the healed man.

³⁵When the crowds came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind.

³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Can we even for a moment comprehend the experience of that man? He has been set free ... !

Why did Jesus send him away when he wanted to follow him? The power of his testimony was more powerful to his community among whom he was known. Jesus may have had other reasons we do not know.

For this man, his recognised need was to be rid of the power that evil held over him. It was so great a power that when he came into the presence of the one who had the power to banish that evil and restore him to personhood and life, it was not fear inducing like the demons, but life giving.

And when he was cleansed of that evil power he was a follower who wanted to follow as a disciple.

But not everyone felt that way. In Matthew 8: ³⁴ The whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

Why would they plead with him to leave. We can understand the demons pleading with Jesus out of **fear**. Was that it? It must be!

The presence of Jesus was too disturbing. For just like the demons, their world would be too disturbed if they admitted Jesus the son of the most high into it. Better ask him to leave and live on in blind denial of the end the demons met and them one day.

In every encounter people had with Jesus, a choice was offered to be made. An offer of life in Jesus, to be accepted or rejected.

Every encounter shows Jesus just supremely capable. Magnificent in his mastery of life and death, and US.

I've spent a lot of my life in public ministry, where for better or for worse one is out there in front expecting, and being expected, to be competent and capable in working with people and the situations in life they encounter.

And you don't need to be a minister to know life dishes up all sorts of unexpected situations that can be scary and stressful.

Wearing a wrist band WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) is a great idea, but often we feel "I haven't got a clue!"

In Hong Kong I knew a woman, Jacky Pullinger, who ministered among street people, drug addicts, prostitutes, triads, and very poor folk. Her ministry was amazing for the love she and her team showed.

She involved herself in scary stuff, was quite Pentecostal in her approach, and a down to earth plain speaking woman. God used her greatly in rescuing many, in the name of Jesus.

One day we were actually ministering together towards a person who had deep needs, and she said as an aside to me "John, let Jesus speak for himself to this person".

This passage confronts us with the kingdom of demonic evil. It's real, it exists. Often unseen, or at least not noticed, but there just the same.

Is the demonic world active in people's lives today? Yes it is. Should we be afraid? It depends.

We should take evil seriously. It exists within us. It's not fear mongering to say that. It seems to me to be self evident.

But God's love casts out fear. If we have God's Holy Spirit within us we are His precious possession – children of the living Saviour, just like that man that day.

But let's finish with the thought: who was the Jesus that man and us meet today?

Jesus – supreme King and Lord. Magnificent in his power, and his love for each one us.

Don't send him away, ask to be disciple. Know Jesus, Know life today.