Text: Luke 8:26-39

**Introduction**

So the blues, purples, reds and whites have all been put away. We now have 23 straight weeks of green altar paraments. And with that change in sanctuary color, the lessons revert back to some notion of linear time.

**Text**

We pickup the Gospel according to Luke roughly at the end of the Galilean ministry. Luke’s outline – similar to Matthew and Mark – is rather simple. Upfront you have the Christmas and childhood stories. You jump over roughly 20 years – sometimes called the quiet years – and it all starts in Galilee…northern Israel. That’s the time of miracles and large crowds and growing popularity, but also as the fame of Jesus spreads, and he picks some specific fights with various Pharisees and priest, the opposition starts to take form. Something that is rather unique to Luke, and which technically we will spend most of the summer in, is the travel narrative. Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem and Luke narrates a bunch of events that are on the way. The last part of Luke’s outline being the passion story in Jerusalem. But right now, we are in the waning days of Galilee.

And for some reason Jesus has decided to cross to the other side of the lake of Galilee. Along the way across is one of the calming of the storm miracles. Luke doesn’t have Jesus walking on the water or Peter getting out of the boat. Luke has Jesus sleeping as the storm looks to swamp them before he rebukes the storm. Arriving on the other side of the Lake of Galilee, they are in Gentile territory.

And immediately they are met by a man of that country with demons. Notice the plural. And also I’d urge us to hear closely the description. For a long time he had worn no clothes. He did not live in a house. He lived among the tombs. The description is a physical description, but I believe we should also take is as representative of the general spiritual condition. A person who goes about without clothes is a person without shame. The natural law – the law written on our hearts – was no longer meaningful. A person who does not have a place called home, doesn’t have connection to life. He has abandoned his family and kin. The household was often the center of work as well, so the man has creative purpose. The things that most people find meaning from: family, work, community, the man had cast off. Instead he lived among the tombs, the graveyard. Instead of being part of life, he had embraced the things of death. And to a good Jew – as Jesus and the disciples were – the tombs would be unclean.

I think that is a description of the Spiritual state of the gentiles at that time. And it had been such for the long time. After the flood and babel God had spread mankind in their tribes and languages...eventually peoples and nations…across the face of the earth, but he had largely turned them over to the Spirits of the Air as Paul would call them. They abandoned the knowledge of the true God that they had in exchange for images of the creation. And they became spiritually foolish. But God separated out Abraham and his lineage as his select. And here is the Seed of Abraham meeting the representative of the Gentiles.

“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God.” The demons acknowledge who Jesus is. They acknowledge that he has some power over them. “I beg you, do not torment me.” But C’mon Jesus, we’ve had this arrangement a long time. You can have your Jews, and we get the rest.

And maybe this is a stretch, but I think the man can be a very good representative of the spiritual state of the world today. Shameless. It marches for pride. But also embracing death in every way. Whether that is killing babies or old folks because both are inconvenient and expensive. Or the ease with which we walk past Lazarus at our gates or disrupt long patterns of life. And at every turn claiming to be for the individual, but destroying the household. I think just as much as this man represented the Gentile world at the dawn of the church, the man possessed by a Legion is very representative of our world. When you turn you back on the living God and worship the things of creation, this is what it looks like.

Shameless, homeless, chasing death and bound in chains of sin. The home of a legion, fore many demons had entered him.

**Christology**

And as desperate as that situation may appear or feel, we have to remember – Christ has won. He’s crossed the distance of that sea. The long years of Patriarchs and Prophet…The incarnation…God became man to heal the breach and win and to give us the victory. And the demons do answer to him. They might be confused about what Jesus is doing here. Which I also imagine in often the case. Jesus seems to delight in showing up where the demons would least expect it. The places where they would feel most secure are where his Word shows up. Because that is all it takes. “He commanded the unclean Spirits to come out of the man.”

It is the proclamation of the Word that sets the prisoners free. Your sins are forgiven. The iron fetters can’t hold you and the demons no longer have control. You have been set free by Christ to walk in the good works he’s laid out for you. Those demons are reduced to begging Jesus for permission to enter a herd of pigs. But even when Jesus gives them permission they reveal just what they are. They seek the death of every living thing. But Christ has set us free from them.

Christ has overcome the world. And His Spirit has been poured out to renew those who have dwelt in a land of deep darkness. Satan and his legion may appear powerful, but on little Word fells them.

**Moral**

The question then becomes what do we do with this freedom?

Our test gives us three examples. The first examples comes from all those who had witnessed Jesus freeing this man. They went to the city and the country and told what had happened. And everyone goes out and finds it exactly as was told. The shameless death obsessed man is at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. They see a man in full made free. And instead of rejoicing and seeking after such freedom themselves – “they were afraid…and they asked Jesus to depart from them.”

When that real freedom – the freedom of Christ - comes to us or to someone near, a response can be fear. Keep it away from me. I like the chains I have forged. I am comfortable with my current masters. I do not wish this freedom. And we ask Jesus to leave. “So he got into the boat and returned.” And this is the sad thing, we can actually do this. We can chase God from our lives. We can spurn the freedom offered.

The second example is the man himself. “he begged that he might be with Jesus.” It’s common to wonder I think why God sometimes makes living the Christian life so tough. Why are we exposed to such temptation? Why are we not raptured immediately? And Christians in many different times and places have attempted various ways of begging to be with Jesus right now. Whether you have the modern fairy tale of the rapture – when things get back God will blink you out of it. Or whether you might think of escaping to the monastic life. Or the withdrawal to various forms of Christian community – from the Bruderhoff to the Amish to a bunch of others I could run down. There is always the desire to make the eschaton now. Let us be with Jesus physically now.

But Jesus gives that man his reply. “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” What we are called to do with this freedom is to live it in front of the world. The world that fears God so much it asks him to leave. We are called to witness to the might providence of God. To testify in our lives just how much God has done for us. Freed us from our chains, gave us clothes and placed us in our right minds. We are called to return to our homes and live that life of witness.

**Eschatological**

It is one of the stories in the Scripture that has a happy ending. The man went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. He’s often paired with the Samaritan woman at the well who does the same thing. The mission of the church – from Jerusalem, to Judea, and Samaria and the ends of the earth, is seeded by the work of Jesus. The Spirit proceeds anywhere we go.

That legion is still out there. Satan is still trying to accomplish the same things. Stay out of the Abyss for as long as the can. Take as many to the Abyss with them as they can.

But you have been set free. You have been set free in this world to witness to the Love of Christ for you. And you have been set free to live in eternity not in the Abyss, but in the new heavens and the new earth. A new creation. You have been set free with a purpose. To live. To live as the people of God. Whether that is here in this world, or in the New Jerusalem. You have been freed to live.