

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 8:26–39

Sermon: “Tell Your Story”

The Gospel of Luke is unique in nature, written by a Gentile for the Gentiles. Throughout the book, he emphasizes Jesus’ mission to bring the Gospel to the whole world, including pagan people. We see this in the story of the healing of the demon-possessed man, who is living in Gentile territory. Immediately preceding this text, Jesus calms a storm on the Sea of Galilee (8:22–25). The seas are a symbol of chaos and the powers of evil. Jesus demonstrates his power over both the forces of nature and the forces of evil, driving away the chaos and bringing a sense of calm. In both texts, the words of Jesus are obeyed. The storm is calmed. The demons are driven out. And, in the end, this once-deranged man is now told to go and tell others what Jesus has done for him.

In the book *Hell from the Heavens* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2015), John Wukovits describes the epic story of the largest single-ship kamikaze attack of World War II. The date was April 16, 1945. The battle was Okinawa. The target was the USS *Laffey*, a battle-hardened destroyer, a ship primarily assigned to protect other ships from submarines.

The *Laffey* had been involved in three prior assaults in the Pacific. The ship had seen combat, but nothing prepared the crew for this eighty-minute ordeal in which they were targeted repeatedly by Japanese suicide aircraft. By the time the smoke settled, they'd been hit by no fewer than twenty-two kamikazes. And yet, while they sustained significant damage, they were not destroyed. And it's this story that sets us up for another epic battle, one that Jesus enters into in Luke 8:26–29.

The scene is moments after Jesus has calmed the wild waves of the Sea of Galilee. And now, he enters “uncharted territory” the Gerasenes. Pagan property. A dismal place where the demons roamed. And so, we read, ***“When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons”*** (v 27a). This guy was in rough shape. He was a “streaker” who hung out with skeletons; he didn't wear clothes and he lived in the tombs (v 27b). People had attempted to keep him under lock and key, but he repeatedly broke free. Crazy man. And as Jesus and the disciples haul the boat up on shore, Jesus comes face-to-face with this deranged demoniac. Scary situation. His name? Legion. Luke explains that this is because many demons had gone into him.

A legion was a unit of Roman soldiers numbering around six thousand. Can you imagine the damage that thousands of demons were inflicting on this poor man?

But while Jesus is outnumbered, he is not outmatched. As we listen to the verbiage of the story we'll find out who is in control of the battle. It's Jesus. The demons are begging Jesus not to obliterate them completely by sending them into the abyss, that eternal destination of the damned. You don't beg if you're in control; you beg if you're being controlled. Like a prisoner of war who begs his captors for leniency or a criminal who begs the judge to reduce his sentence, they beg Jesus to go easy on them, to send them into a herd of swine which Jesus obliges. And what happens? Luke records: ***"The herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned"*** (v 33). They were sunk. What the kamikazes were unable to do to the USS *Laffey*, the demons did to the pigs. They went down and met their watery grave.

But the story isn't over. We go back to the poor demoniac. Where is he? He was freed. He is ***"sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind."*** It's the posture of a disciple. In Jewish culture, to sit at someone's feet was to become a disciple of the rabbi.

This man is ready to stick with Jesus. In fact, he ***“begged that he might be with him.”*** There is that language again, recognizing that Jesus is in control. What does Jesus say? ***“Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.”*** In other words, share your story. The man wants to be a student, but Jesus calls him to be a storyteller. “Go and tell those who saw your previous way of life how much I’ve done for you. Tell them the story of what you went through. Tell them of the One who delivered you from the destroyer.”

This story Luke narrates is epic similar to the story that John Wukovits recounts from the USS *Laffey*. It’s a story of warfare. The Bible speaks of our struggle ***“against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”*** (Ephesians 6:12). Here’s how it breaks down: The devil is a destroyer. John 10:10 says that he’s come to ***“kill and destroy.”*** Revelation 9:11 calls him the ***“angel of the bottomless pit”*** the abyss and “Apollyon,” which translates as “the destroyer.” Make no mistake, Satan and his minions have one goal and one goal only: to destroy. Think of what they destroyed in this man. They destroyed his dignity naked and living amongst the dead.

They destroyed his relationships ostracized from his community, living alone. And when cast out into the herd of pigs, what did they do? They destroyed them.

And to this day, we see Satan's destructive forces at play in the lives of people, in our own lives. Destroying marriages, destroying relationships, destroying livelihoods, destroying the lives of the unborn, destroying churches, destroying the mental health of individuals. It's one assault after another. Verse 29 says that "*for many a time it [the evil spirit] had seized him.*" Many a time. One after another, to the point of exhaustion, when we're ready to admit defeat. Sometimes our lives feel like the USS *Laffey* as we endure one suicide plane slamming into us after another, trying to sink us.

But some might ask: Are there demons still roaming the skies and seas today, lurking there, waiting to destroy us? Think about people in the grip of drug abuse or alcohol addiction or caught up in destructive lusts of the flesh that inflict pain not only on them but on others around them. And whether these forces are chemical or psychological, there can be little doubt that they are still the remnants of a fallen world that Satan exploits.

When we find ourselves here, what do we do? We cling to the Gospel. And the Gospel proclaims simply this: “[*Jesus came*] to *destroy the works of the devil*” (1 John 3:8). While Satan claims to be the destroyer, the Gospel proclaims that Satan, the destroyer, has been disarmed at the Cross and will one day be destroyed.

The apostle Paul says in Colossians 2:15 that Jesus has disarmed the powers of evil, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. And so, we cling to Jesus, knowing that by his death and resurrection he has destroyed Satan’s power and will deliver us from the destruction that the devil desires to inflict upon us.

We find this as we turn to two places: (1) We go back to our Baptism. Sometimes this is lost in the modern baptismal rite, but in years past, Baptism was seen as an exorcism. The *LSB Altar Book* includes an alternate form of the Baptism service, based on Martin Luther’s Baptism rite. In it, the baptizer says, **“Depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (*LSB Altar Book*, p 374). Speaking of Baptism, notice what happens to the herd of pigs that the demons are cast into. They rush down a steep embankment and are drowned.

And isn't that what Baptism signifies? Martin Luther says: **“It indicates that the Old Adam in us [perhaps we could say, the demons in our lives] should by daily contrition and repentance be *drowned and die with all sins and evil desires*”** (SC, Baptism, Fourth Part). And so, when we face our demons, we declare over them that we are baptized, that they now have no power over us.

Which brings us to the second place we turn: (2) We go back to the Words of the Bible. We go to the clear words of God that proclaim Jesus' victorious death on the cross, the forgiveness of sins it won, and the power of God over the onslaughts of Satan that it is. **“*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*”** (1 John 4:4).

And then, as we continue to experience the deliverance of Jesus in our lives, we simply tell our story. Like those sailors aboard the USS *Laffey*, who limped away from battle, scarred and yet victorious, and told their story. Like the man who was once demon-possessed, who was told by Jesus to **“*return to [his] home, and declare how much God had done for*”** him. We, too, have a story to tell. And that story begins at home. We tell those who know us well what Jesus has done for us. Tell your story. And tell it well. Amen