

Graveyard Prayers  
Luke 8:26-40  
June 19, 2016

*Then [Jesus and his disciples] sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and 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. And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him.*

As you read through the Bible, you find people praying in a variety of places and in a variety of circumstances. Jonah prayed in the belly of a great fish. Daniel prayed in a den full of lions. Paul prayed on a sinking ship. Paul also prayed while chained in prison.

However, today's Gospel reading records three prayers that took place in a rather unusual place. The text speaks about three prayers in a graveyard. Jesus answered two of those prayers with a "yes," and one with a "no."

**The first prayer is: The prayer of the demons.**

Jesus and his disciples land on shore, and the first person they run into is a man who is demon-possessed. Jesus commands the evil spirit to leave the man. Consider the response to that command: *What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?*

(Lk 8:28 ESV).

The demons didn't need a formal introduction. They know exactly who Jesus is. If you read through Scripture, you will see that every time Jesus came into contact with an evil spirit, the spirit knows who Jesus is. In the desert, during Jesus' temptation, Satan has no questions about whom Jesus is. Sadly, these demons have a better grasp of whom

Jesus is than some of today's liberal theologians.

In the book of James we hear: *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!* (Jas 2:19 ESV). While knowing who Jesus is should make everyone stand in awe and fear of him, mere knowledge of Jesus' true identity is not enough. The Christian life is a life committed to our Savior. If you know who Jesus is, but you're not truly committed to him, you're no better off than those demons.

The text says this man was demon-possessed. Is demon possession real? You'd better believe it. This man wasn't just mentally disturbed. The demons in him had taken his health, his sanity, his morality, and his decency. They were destroying his mind and his body. This man had no peace. This is the condition of anyone under Satan's control.

Don't misunderstand, I doubt you're going to find anyone whose head will spin around and spit pea soup on you – like you see in the movie "The Exorcist." However, Satan takes over people's lives through drugs, alcohol, pornography, sex, gambling, and a host of other things.

If that frightens you, listen to this. Satan and his demons are powerless in the presence of Jesus. In the reading, there is no doubt in the demons' minds whether Jesus held complete power over them. They didn't question whether or not Jesus could drive them out of the man.

That means that no evil power from any source can infect and hold a person who has the Holy Spirit living in him or her. St John writes: *Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world* (1 Jn 4:4 ESV).

Let's look at the actual prayer of the demons: *"I beg you, don't torment me!"* (Lk 8:28 ESV). Do you see anything a little odd here? They beg Jesus not to torment them, but what had they been doing to this poor man? Isn't that the way it always is? The bully always pleads for mercy when he is overpowered or outnumbered.

The remainder of their prayer is paraphrased: *They begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission* (Lk 8:31-32 ESV). Elsewhere in Scripture, the Abyss is used to denote the place of eternal torment which God has made for Satan and his angels.

The demons ask to be sent into a herd of pigs, and Jesus agrees. When they enter the pigs, the animals rush down the embankment into the water and drown.

**The next prayer in the text is: The prayer of the people of the area.**

The folks tending the pigs took off through the area and reported what happened to the urbanites and the suburbanites. This sort of story brought everyone out to the graveyard. What they found was nothing short of a miracle, and they knew it: *Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and 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* (Lk 8:35 ESV).

Wonder of wonders, the man who had terrorized the neighborhood, the man who had run through the streets naked, was calmly sitting at Jesus' feet, in full possession of this right mind. This should have been cause for celebration. The man was as normal as normal can be. But the text tells us celebration wasn't what happened. Instead, Luke says: *They were afraid* (Lk 8:35 ESV).

As long as this poor man was a raving lunatic, the people were content. When Jesus healed the man, the people became nervous. If that sounds odd, it's not. Status quo had been disturbed.

A similar thing happens today to some people when God rescues them from some form of evil grip. When God heals the alcoholic, the drug addict, someone held in sexual bondage, people around that person don't know how to react. They can become nervous and scared. Sometimes they act like the one who has been saved is now crazy.

Consider what the people ask of Jesus: *Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them* (Lk 8:37 ESV). All the people, not some of the people, not just the ones who used to own the pigs – everyone. They could easily see who Jesus is, and they didn't want him around.

People today are no different. Over and over and over we hear it said that we live in a "Christian" nation. Yet we don't want Jesus in our government. We don't want Jesus in our schools. We don't have room enough to have Jesus in our homes. And, unfortunately, too many churches don't have room for Jesus either.

The request of the people brings Jesus' second positive response. Jesus honors their prayer. He gets into the boat and goes back across the lake. The people of the Gerasenes couldn't wait for Jesus to leave. But, we are told that the people on the other side of the lake were overjoyed to see Jesus return (Lk 8:40).

The question might be asked, "Why would Jesus leave a group of people who so desperately needed him?" The answer is that Jesus will never force himself on anyone.

While it is true that Jesus wants everyone to be saved, salvation is an offer that people can refuse. In the book of Revelation, Jesus says: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me* (Re 3:20 ESV). Jesus knocks on the door, he doesn't break it down.

### **The third prayer is: The prayer of the man who was healed.**

The man begs to go with Jesus and the disciples. This is a natural response. Jesus had delivered the man from a horrible existence. It's reasonable for him to want to be as

close to Jesus as possible. He has a new life and he wants to use that life to serve his Savior.

However, Jesus tells him “no.” Jesus had something different in mind for this new believer. Jesus wanted this man to become a witness to the people of his town.

Sometimes you might get the feeling that it would be wonderful to spend all of your time in church praising the Lord, but that isn’t getting the job done. While praising God is very important, the Christian’s primary vocation is to make disciples of all nations. That means leaving the sanctuary and taking the Word to the people. It’s what Jesus told the man to do: *Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.*” (Lk 8:39 ESV).

Jesus sent this man out as a missionary. It’s important to notice that the man didn’t object. He didn’t question, he didn’t hesitate, he didn’t offer any excuses, he didn’t try to explain that witnessing wasn’t his gift, or even that talking about Jesus was politically incorrect. Our reading says: *He went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him* (Lk 8:39 ESV).

I suggest we all could take a lesson from this formerly demon-possessed man. After all, at one time, we are all in his shoes. Before the Holy Spirit gave us the gift of faith, we all were in the grip of Satan. Just as surely as this man was saved, we have all been saved by the power of Jesus. And like this man, we should all be telling all over town how much Jesus has done for us.