

# A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

By Burt L. Burleson

“Undivided”

Luke 8: 26-39

June 24, 2007

This is a really interesting story, here in Luke 8, isn't it? Actually, it's sort of scary and bizarre... about a man who is torn into a thousand pieces. He is frightening. Luke says he's naked. All over his body, there are gashes and cuts and scars.

His eyes are wild.

His hair is long and matted... total dreadlocks.

His beard is down to his chest.

His body is covered with his own filth. He smells.

On his wrist, there are steel shackles and chains hanging from them... so everywhere he goes, along with the shrieks, there is this constant rattling... and folks can hear him at night.

Everyone knows of him and stays clear... he's a wild, tornado of a man.

On this day, Jesus had just finished calming a storm on the sea and then he steps ashore and steps right into another storm. This stormy man comes straight at Jesus... and when Jesus asks for a name? **“There are thousands of us in here... more than can be counted.” “I'm Legion.”**

And then, just like that, 1000 demons were cast out of a man and into some pigs. This is a weird story.

There are lots of reactions to a weird story like this... you might have. I mean, if you're a gentile in the bacon business... well... this is a pretty upsetting story. Jews, sort of liked this ending... where the little pigs go “wee, wee, wee, into the ocean.” Someone said this was actually when deviled ham was invented.

There are lots of reactions you might have. You might say to yourself, **“Well, that's just a little too strange and ancient and I don't really, you know, do the demon thing so I'm going to skip over it and read a nicer story... where's that one about the Good Samaritan.”**

You might, as I suspect the early Christians did, take note of this display of power. It's something, isn't it.

Typically, in an exorcism of the day, the exorcist would probably be doing all sorts of incantations and spiritual mumbo jumbo to get a demon to go away and here Jesus is and with one word, a thousand of them are gone. Just like that...

He told the sea to be still and it was.

He told the demons to scram and they did.

This is real power.

... over what is outside of us and what is inside of us. It's overwhelming power, over things that are overwhelming... and part of us reacts to this and says **“Wow!!!!”**

But then part of us... at least in some of us... says... **“I'd sure like that power to help me with what's overwhelming me...”** And so maybe you're thinking, as you read about this man so broken and so healed... **“I'd sure like some of that. We could sure use some of that”**

This man named Legion isn't the only one who has been driven into solitary places, is he? He's not the only one whose head is filled...

With competing voices...

Angry voices...

Voices of despair and self-destruction.

This man isn't the only one who feels split and torn and tugged and who is driven towards the tombs. Lot of folks got there and for all sorts of reasons... Wonder why he did?

A preacher acquaintance of mine (Paul Duke) wondered, **"Is he out there because someone he had lost was buried in that cemetery?"**

**A spouse, maybe?**

**A child?**

**A friend?**

**Is that where it all started? Grief hollowed him out and split him in two."** He lost a loved one and his self... and his response was to move towards death. It wouldn't have been the first or the last time. He's not the only one, is he?

I'm going to tell you something that you know but if you haven't let it dawn on you then you should. I just need to say this and was reminded of it by a friend at lectionary breakfast... Everyone here in this room is not too very far from this man or someone like him.

I'd bet my paycheck, were I a betting pastor... that you are close to someone who has battled some form of mental anguish like this, inner brokenness of some kind... It's someone you love or perhaps ... it's you. Anxiety... depression... some compulsion or addiction that has your number completely.

Something that is there, you can't stop it.

It's in you, and makes life in the world so hard...

And it drives you to that solitary place

like these demons drove this man.

We know this man in the tombs... It's not just some mythical character in a biblical story... We've prayed for this guy... prayed about him. We've lived with him, tried to help him, been frustrated for him.

And... we've asked Jesus to say over it all **"be gone, peace be still."**

And perhaps we've known something and seen something change... or change some... but for many, and I just have to say this, we haven't seen that... and we've wondered why? And we've cried... and prayed and prayed some more...

... It's part of the way we react when we read a story like this one... and we have to say that in here from time to time... We've known this overwhelming Legion and it's still overwhelming to so many.

And truth be told... I think he is just a frightening enlargement of us all. He's just humanity blown up on, projected on, the wall. We all are fighting battles within. It may not be labeled a sickness in us by the medical profession but it's in us... **"The things we want to do, we can't do... The things we don't want to do we keep doing,"** Paul says. Sounds like a sickness to me.

Julie and I were South Dakota a few years back ... and I think it was in some gift shop that I saw a map of the state hanging on a wall. In the area they call The Badlands (which are very desolate and bad lands) were the words (often found on ancient maps) **"Here be dragons."** Those who mapped out the world, sensed that in the places you couldn't see...

in the dark places...

there was something with which to conflict...

some opposition there.

People went out there and didn't come back... who knows what got them. It's a dangerous place where you face something that is against you.

The ancients who went into the desert knew about that and said that the struggle wasn't so much out there in the desert, as it was, in here. Inside, we are often at war... divided... split... pulled. One of my good friends refers to this as the committee in his head. There are competing voices and opinions and desires... at least that's what it sounds like in my head.

Margaret Atwood has a poem where she says,

**“Most hearts say... ‘I want, I want, I want, I want’.”**

**“My heart is more duplicitous... it says,**

**‘I want, I don't want. I want, I don't want. I want I don't want’.”**

Our hearts are divided...

Like the man in Luke 8.

There's no center.

Our hearts run in a million directions.

... controlled by this and by that. Legion is the name of all that wants a piece of us.

Every voice within us wanting a hearing.

Every part of us, a vote.

It's no wonder we feel crazy.

It's no wonder we act the way we do... no wonder we go seeking lonely places. That's what happens, unfortunately. In our dividedness we move towards death... We run from people because they're making us crazy, we think.

We avoid community because they won't understand, we think.

We've got to figure this out for ourselves, we think.

And out there, in that isolated place, whatever we're dealing with gets worse.

And honestly, a part of the reason we go away is because often the communities we've known don't do so well with our darkness. You know what I mean, don't you? Church is not always a safe place to be and a safe place to be broken.

We're often, as the Church... just so... anxious and limited in what we can do. Like these folks... The response from the community in Luke 8 was restraint. That's all they knew to do. **“We must control this.”**

When we don't know how to deal with darkness in others or ourselves we resort to that... and our religion becomes primarily about restraint. **“Put some chains on that guy... In fact, put some chains on everybody.”** It's sort of a Moral Majority impulse... And it's not all bad; it's just never enough.

And... it doesn't really work all that well. He kept breaking loose, we all do. Chains don't change anything. You can restrain the outside but unless there's something inside centering you... the storm down there in the deep place will continue and just drive you crazy.

What we need, you know... is an organizing center. We do not need chains to bind us, we need a sovereign who rules us. We are legion... culture and jobs and habits and people and passions and longings and sin – it's just way too much. We need a sovereign.

Do you want one? Really? ... You sure?

There is a painting in a church in Ft. Worth of this scene. The artist chose to paint this moment where they meet. One hand is clutching Jesus' cloak and pulling it over his face, hiding... while the other hand is reaching up to Jesus' face as if pleading for help. He's ambivalent... uncertain... **“I want, I don't want.”** (Paul Duke)

Do I want to be healed?  
... be different?

I don't always know.

Because my brokenness, as much trouble as it is, is pretty comfortable...so familiar. Divine sovereignty means I must be willing to come out of my tomb.

Notice, Paul Duke says of this story, that Jesus doesn't wait for the man to get it all together before giving him the gift. We don't have to be all resolved and unconflicted. Christ stepped into the confusion... and when he did...things changed. Transformation really does happen. Things can change. The man changed.

He's in **his right mind. He's reoriented to another place within himself. The inner mind – the "nous."**

The man, of course, wants to go with Jesus. **"Don't leave me here. The stuff that made me crazy is here. My mother-in-law is still here."**

Wouldn't you want to stay right there on the heels of your healer? If he leaves without you, no telling what might happen. **"It'd be easier, Jesus, if you'd take me with you."** He doesn't take him, which means I guess that Jesus can never become our excuse for avoiding things that must be faced.

He's to stay there, in the Decapolis, these Greekish cities to bear witness... which actually makes him the first apostle to the Gentiles... sorry Paul. And it also makes him a wounded healer... a good one I'll bet.

If you lived there in the Decapolis and felt a bit crazy... I bet you'd go talk to him, especially if something had a hold of you. And you would know a certain grace. And he'd tell you that you can make it one day at a time. And I'll bet he would bear witness to you. About his own darkness and the one who had delivered him from it. He would tell you there is a power that can flow to you...there is a help that is beyond you. It is the reality of God and it is moving us all towards salvation.

And I bet he'd pray with you and, no doubt, borrow that great line from the Psalmist (86: 11). O God we pray for, **an undivided heart.** **"Unite our hearts, O God. Please God, unite our hearts."** Amen.

*Many of the insights in this sermon were taken from a sermon preached by Paul Duke at the Woodmont Baptist Church in February of 1999. They were too important and too good not to share with my congregation.*