

In the name of Jesus.

“They found the man...sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.”

You’ve probably never heard a scarier statement, right? It certainly seems that the townsmen had never seen a scarier sight. To them it’s worse than a possessed man, breaking out of shackles and running naked around tombs. Yet to you and I, this seems like a disciple, sitting at Christ’s feet, learning and receiving from Him.

In order for this to be a jarring moment, in order for you and I to understand why the town is struck by fear, we must step into their shoes and walk back a few moments.

Imagine it’s years before this interaction with Jesus, and you’re just going about your business. You’re out in the field with your pigs, doing what all pig farmers do, and you stop to chat with Jackson, a fellow farmer. He tells you “You know my neighbour, I heard him screaming out last night. Like, deep from his chest shouts, all in gibberish.” “He probably just had too much to drink, went a little wild, you know how it is,” you say. “I’d say he went wild, yeah. All the pots were broken on his front porch when I walked by this morning.”

So you both chuckle at the crazy neighbour and go back to tending your swine. But this isn’t the last time something happens with the crazy neighbour. Rumors continue to swirl until it’s known that he is absolutely out of his mind. Years go by and now he’s even chasing citizens through the street, tearing away his clothes and crying out some unknown language.

Eventually the town finds his family and holds them accountable. “Deal with your brother,” they say.

Everyone is scared at this point. We get that. Everyone in the town is happy when they finally track him down—he's fled to the tombs at this point—and chain him up so that he can't do any more damage. They're a faithful family, taking him food as he needs, caring as best as one can care for a deranged family member, but one day they go with the bread and honey and he's not there. The loincloths lay on the ground, the chains are splintered, and the only trace of him are the screams in the distance.

So there's no fixing this problem. People learn to live with the man they've since understood is possessed. He likes living among the dead, and people just stay away as much as possible, and he becomes a regular fixture of the community. A terrifying situation becomes simply the norm.

Until Jesus comes on the scene.

The herdsmen see Jesus and His disciples getting out of their boat, and, fools that they are, they begin walking in the vicinity of the possessed man. And Luke doesn't tell us how much the herdsmen know, or whether they simply watch at a distance, but given their job at hand and their desire to stay away from the possessed man, they probably witness the interaction from a ways off.

Jesus entertains the man for longer than anyone else ever has—it seems He's actually having a conversation with the demoniac; for some reason the possessed man falls to his knees, as if pleading with Jesus; and then all of a sudden their pigs are excited and they begin charging towards the sea, tumbling to their death.

Outraged, the herdsmen go to gather back up, hoping the town can figure out what on earth has just taken place, but when they return, they are struck by fear.

The man is clothed, the man is calm, the man is listening and in his right mind at the feet of Jesus. Nothing else had been able to help. Nothing else could protect the citizens from his anger and chaos, and yet in the span of a simple conversation, he is well again.

Who is this that can reason with the unreasonable? Who is this that can calm the chaotic? Who can convince the naked to get dressed and to sit at His feet and listen? Beyond the ordeal with the pigs, these herdsmen and townsfolk realize they are in the presence of one stronger than the demons.

Jesus' power is obvious here, yet it's entirely beyond their comprehension, what He did let alone how He did it. Only those who heard His words, who witnessed His will could know that Jesus dealt with the root of the problem. The demons that had separated him from his community, that had made working and relaxing and living an absolute impossibility, that had turned him into a dead man walking, living among the tombs, these demons were banished from his being, sent to drown in the sea before their eternity in the abyss.

This is the power of Christ. It turns property of the devil into disciples of Christ and children of God.

Friends, if anyone walked into this sanctuary, they should be terrified as well.

Though few, if any of us, have been truly possessed, there was a time where we were on side with Satan, true enemies of God. Luther's baptismal rite even includes a prayer of exorcism, acknowledging that as God makes you His own, Satan no longer has a say over you. And just as the pigs drowned with this man's demons inside, your Old Adam was drowned, put to death, with all your sin and rebellion.

All of us, none excepted, are uncontrollable sinners without Christ. God places His law upon this world so we cannot go on a carnal rampage; police and parents and government curb our worst desires, but if we were left on our own, we'd leave our world shredded to pieces. Our sin makes it so that we don't even need to be possessed to be a terror to our neighbours, though adding demons into the mix would certainly increase our pandemonium.

It's people like the demoniac, like you and me that Christ comes to. Not at our request but at our need, Christ enters this world looking for people lost to their own whims and impulses. He seeks those who don't seek Him. He seeks those who can't seek Him.

He comes into our midst, bringing the kingdom of God with its peace in place of our chaos, life in place of our death, righteousness in place of our sin.

It was no mistake that Jesus wandered into the midst of the possessed man, just as it was no mistake that a friend shared the Gospel with you, that you were baptized into your family, that you read that particular article—through His word, Jesus wandered into your life and has brought you peace and order.

We're not told what Jesus told the clothed and quiet man, but all throughout His ministry He speaks of the kingdom now present. Whatever He does share, that man wants to follow and keep learning; he wants to receive more and more from this man who has given him his life back. But Jesus sends him back to his community to share what God has done for him; he is now sent to those afraid to proclaim what the Lord has done for him that they may believe and receive their life back, and so he shares what Jesus has done for him.

Did you catch that?

He's told to proclaim what *God* has done for him, and he proclaims what *Jesus* has done for him. What God does is what Jesus does. God has sent Jesus to bring the kingdom of God, and all its delightful gifts, and He does it leading up to and culminating in the cross, where Jesus not only cast out sin and demons and death, but stole them onto Himself.

Having heard this message, He clothes you in His righteousness and invites you to sit at His feet so that you may have more of His peace, His joy, His life. And having heard such news, we go with Him to proclaim all that God has done for us, that others may have renewed life just like us. We go, no longer driven by our sinful desires but by the freedom of Christ's love. Truly Christ the Lord comes to free us and the world around us from the grasp of sin, of death, and of the devil, that we may be His today and for all eternity.

Amen

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep our hearts and minds fixed on Christ Jesus.

Amen.