



## POSSESSION, PROBLEMS, AND PIGS AT THE LAKE

*Prof. Duane T. Loynes, Sr.*

*Sunday, June 19, 2016*

*10:00am*

### **Introduction:**

Good morning! On behalf of my wife Ericka and my son Duane Jr. who are here with me this morning, thank you for the privilege of worshiping with you this morning.

Our Gospel Lesson and our sermon text this morning come from Luke 8:26—39.

It reads as follows:

[26] Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. [27] 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. [28] 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.” [29] 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.) [30] Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. [31] And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. [32] 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. [33] Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

[34] When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. [35] 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. [36] And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. [37] 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. [38] The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, [39] “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.

“This is the Gospel of the Lord.” (*Praise to You, O Christ.*)

## “Let it Go”

I hate arriving some place and as soon as I arrive, there’s drama. For example, after work I like coming home to peace and quiet, and having a chance to settle down before I have to deal with any issues.

I can think of some family gatherings where I show up and *as soon as I enter the door*, someone approaches me and something’s wrong and I have to fix it. I can recall showing up at a relative’s house and as soon as I enter the door, someone’s telling me to turn right around and go to the store because someone forgot something.

I hope Jesus isn’t like me. In Luke 8, He’s had a busy schedule and He decides to go across the lake, possibly for some peace and quiet. However, as He’s sleeping on the boat, His disciples exhibit a remarkable lack of faith and He is awakened from His slumber in order to quiet a storm.

Hopefully, things will be better when they land, but *as soon as they touch ground* (the version in Mark uses the word “immediately”), a troubled man approaches him. This man, the text tells us, had demons. And, there was nothing anyone could do. He couldn’t be helped, he was kept under lock and key but would escape and run into the desert to live wildly in caves. He had no hope.

And then, this man encounters Jesus.

And what I love about this passage is the ambiguity in the language. At some points, the language indicates that the man had demons; at other points, the language implies that the demons had the man. But in this case, the ambiguity is instructive.

Because often, the things we think we own, the very things we think we control . . . we wake up one morning and find out that *they control us*.

Let me tell you a secret: I can hold a grudge. There is a stereotype about women that, in marriage, they can tell their husbands the date and time and what they were wearing when their husbands did something wrong. Now, we should eliminate that stereotype for a variety of reasons, chief among them is the fact that it’s not just true of women. \*I\* can remember the date and time and what my wife was wearing when she did something that I didn’t like. Earlier this week, my wife and I had one of those “husband/wife talks” and I reminded her about Sunday, February 9, 2014 at 2:00pm. You’re probably asking yourself, “Who remembers what they were doing on Sunday, February 9, 2014 around 2:00pm?” \*I\* remember what happened on Sunday, February 9, 2014 around 2:00pm.

And, not only do I hold grudges . . . I'm passive aggressive about it which means I hold a grudge but I say I'm not.

Today is Father's Day, so perhaps this grudge-holding story is appropriate. My relationship with my father is complicated. He and my mom never got married, so he wasn't in my life for long. Except for a few trips to visit him in South Carolina as a child, he wasn't a part of my life. Now, initially, I didn't recognize this sense of loss because, unfortunately, many young men and women in my neighborhood were in the same predicament of not having a dad around. But, as I got older—when I could have used fatherly advice and guidance as I tried to navigate a difficult world—I became angry at my father for not being in my life. At some point, my father gave up his wild ways, became a Christian, settled down, got married, and had four kids—kids that he raised, kids that he acknowledged, kids that he supported, kids whose games and school events he attended, kids who had a dad around for advice.

And that made me angrier, because that should have been me. I *needed* that to be me.

Oh, I possessed a grudge, and I felt *justified* in holding that grudge.

But one day, I woke up, and realized that the *grudge possessed me*.

And I came to the realization, and here's the first thing this passage tells us, that I had to let it go. It didn't mean that it was right, it didn't mean that there were no consequences, it didn't mean that there wasn't a sense of loss and hurt. But still . . . I had to let it go.

Now, my family and I have only lived in Holland for 11 months, so I'm no expert on this city or this community. And, I'm told that in 2010 Holland was voted the second happiest city in America. But I'm wondering if there are some other people here, who, like me, need to let some things go. Maybe it's an old hurt that still hasn't healed . . . perhaps it's a grudge against a co-worker . . . perhaps it's something that someone said that still affects your identity today . . . perhaps it's that family member that gets on your nerves . . . maybe it's a child or parent, or your spouse or ex-spouse, or a friend or an ex-friend.

Whatever it is, whoever it is, the good news of the Gospel is that Jesus is willing to do the same thing for you that He did for that man at the lake: He stands ready and willing to release you from the very thing that torments and possesses you.

A quick postscript: last weekend, my wife, son and I went to South Carolina. Partly because of my anger, my wife and son had never met my father, and I hadn't seen him in 20 years. But, we went there, spent time with my dad, his wife, his four amazing and wonderful kids, his awesome granddaughter, and we had a great, great time and now my

family has been wonderfully extended. And, this morning, for the first time in my 42 years of life, I called my dad and wished him a Happy Father's Day. And, I meant it.

Thanks be to God, who gives us the *strength*, to let things go.

### **“Jesus Still Transforms Lives”**

Secondly, this passage reveals something remarkable. Jesus encounters this man one way at the start of the passage, and by the end a radical change has occurred.

Hope Church: I wonder if we've forgotten who we are? I wonder if we've forgotten what the Body of Christ is all about?

In 1994, Disney released a movie called *The Lion King*. It's a story about a young lion named Simba, whose father, Mufasa, oversees the kingdom. One day, Mufasa is killed by his jealous brother, and Simba, though heir to the throne, leaves, feeling guilty and abandons his father's kingdom. He then develops a friendship with two well-meaning but misguided friends who teach him their philosophy about life, “Hakuna Matata.” It means “no worries” (literally, “nothings's the matter”), that life is meant to be lived only with one's cares in mind. So, even though his father's kingdom is being decimated and destroyed, Simba lives for years only worried about his own self and his own comfort.

But one day . . . a stranger comes to Simba and tells him that he knows his father. Simba says, “I'm sorry to tell you, but my father is dead.” The stranger says, “No, he's not dead, he's still alive.” He leads Simba to water and has him look into it. Simba looks, sees his own reflection, and says, disappointingly, “That's not my father. It's just my reflection.” The stranger says “No, look harder.”

Simba looks again and sees the reflection of his father staring back at him. And the stranger says, “You see, he lives in you.” Simba then hears the voice of his father, who appears above him in a cloud, and Simba, I'm sure, had a lot to share, but his father was there with a message:

“You have forgotten who you are. You are more than what you have become.”

Simba resists, but his father, as he leaves, reminds him: “Remember who you are, remember who you are.”

Hope Church: “Remember who you are. He lives in you.”

One of the first Bible verses I memorized as a child was Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but *Christ lives in me.*”

I wonder, if in all of our busyness, and conflicts, and studies, and scholarship, and work, and even ministry . . . I wonder if sometimes we forget who we are.

And I wonder that because the body of Christ used to do big things.

Forget just evangelizing one person, we used to transform nations.

For example: Back in ancient Rome, gladiator games were a popular pastime. And you may have seen the Russell Crowe movie, “Gladiator,” but things weren’t that glamorous. Men and women would fight each other and animals to horrible deaths just to amuse a crowd. Most of the fighters were slaves or convicted criminals, and when they needed more participants, they would just kidnap people and force them to a bloody death.

But, you’ll notice at some point, gladiator games ended. You know why? The Church did that.

Or, consider infanticide (the killing of infants): In Greek and Roman culture, it was common, after the birth of a child, for the child to be left outside, exposed to the elements, if the father deemed the newborn unworthy or if they could not afford the child. We have an actual letter from antiquity written from a husband who was away to his wife who was pregnant. In the letter, he admonishes her, when she gives birth, to keep it if it’s a boy, and kill it if it’s a girl.

But, eventually, infanticide stopped. You know why? The Church did that.

The eradication of slavery? The Church did that.

The restoration of dignity to women? The Church did that.

The ending of apartheid in South Africa? The Church did that.

The ending of brutal dictatorships in Poland and the Philippines? The Church did that.

See? We used to do big things, we used to encounter situations one way, and leave them another way.

But, we’ve forgotten who we are.

I tell you this story to my shame: Back when my family and I lived in Milwaukee, we had a neighbor who moved into the unit above us. Her kids would visit her on the weekends, and they would jump around and make noise, well into the late hours of the night. Not only that, but this woman and her friends liked to occasionally smoke hallucinogenic drugs in their apartment, and they would smoke so much in *their* apartment that even sitting in *my* apartment I got the munchies and wondered why there were elephants walking around my living room.

One day, this woman was the victim of a domestic violence incident. I wasn't home, but my wife called me, having heard the noise upstairs, and I came home and even from my apartment I could hear the woman sobbing on the phone as she relayed the incident to a friend.

Thinking I was helping her, I called the police. The police arrived, she lied to them—saying nothing happened—and then when they left, she got mad at me for calling the cops.

I said, “That’s it. Her kids are loud, she smokes marijuana, she’s mad at me for trying to help her. I’m through.” And, after being in the apartment for only 6 months, she moved.

And, do you know when I saw her moving, when I saw her loading the moving truck, I rejoiced? Because I was only concerned about ME . . . my life, my comfort, no worries, hakuna matata.

But, not one time did I invite my neighbor downstairs, sit her down along with my wife, and tell her about a God who loves her. I never told her about a Luke 8 savior who meets people one way, and leaves them another way.

Why? Because I forgot who I am. I forgot that this life is not about me, I am an ambassador, imploring people on behalf of Christ to be reconciled with God.

Hope Church, we are more than what we have become.

## **Conclusion**

So, what is our response?

It’s the same thing that Jesus told this man. Freed, liberated, clothed and in his right mind for the first time in a long time, this man sat there, an open testimony to the grace of God.

Jesus is ready to depart, and the man wanted to go with Him. Jesus says, in effect, “No, you just got saved. You’re not ready to be a disciple yet. But here’s what I want you to do (verse 39): go out to Holland, go back to your home by the lake, and tell everyone what God has done for you.” And the man left and proclaimed to the entire city what Jesus had done for him.

As we leave this place, let us leave knowing that God longs to free us from the things we possess, and from the things that possess us. And as we leave, let us remember who we are, and proclaim to the world that Jesus still transforms lives.

Amen.