

## **House Calls** Luke 8:26-39

There was a story in the news recently about a man who was working on water heater in his basement, and somehow it fell and pinned the man's arm underneath it. He lived alone, and he didn't have his cell phone with him, so he was stuck there in the basement, unable to get help, his arm getting gangrenous from lack of blood supply. Finally, after three long days, he was saved when co-workers got concerned and broke his door down after he failed to show up for work.

There are times in life when, as much as we'd like to think we can manage just fine on our own, we just don't have the resources to go for help, and we need help to come to us.

In a lot of the healing stories in the gospel people go to great lengths either to present themselves to Jesus to be healed, or to get someone to Jesus to be healed. The blind beggar in Jericho caused quite a scene, jumping up and down and waving and yelling to get Jesus' attention as he went by. The woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years shoved her way through an enormous crowd in hopes of a sneak healing. A bunch of guys dug through someone's roof to lower their buddy through the attic and into someone's living room so Jesus could heal him.

But if you read through Luke's gospel carefully what you'll notice is that most of the people Jesus heals never asked him. He just does it, unasked, uninvited, like the man with the withered hand in the synagogue, and the widow whose son had died. There's no explanation as to why they don't ask; maybe it never crosses their minds, maybe they've just learned to live with it; maybe they've given up hope.

The story of the Geresene demoniac tells a similar story, but with a twist to it. At this point the disciples should have been ready for a bit of a shake-up. Luke has just told us that among Jesus' disciples are several women, not all of them obvious disciple-material; he has declared that his real family aren't his mother and brothers, who were worried sick about him, the way he was behaving, but the people who were just as crazy as he was, going around forgiving and loving and tending to neighbors. Then he got in a boat and commanded a nasty squall to stop immediately, and it did. If the disciples had any sense at all they would have given up being shocked and alarmed at the things they were seeing, and just been ready for the next head-spinning thing to happen. I think it was Dorothy Sayers who said that Jesus was crucified for a lot of reasons, but being dull was not one of them.

I love what Luke says here. Still in the boat, Jesus and the disciples go to the country of the Geresenes, 'opposite' Galilee. Knowing Luke and his love of language, he fully meant for that to be a double entendre. The Geresenes were across the lake from Tiberius, in Galilee, but it was also opposite Galilee in every other way. Luke tells us that by letting us know that they were the sort of people who kept pigs. They were Gentiles, non-Jews, people outside the covenant with God. It was yet another head-spinning moment, Jesus' way of telling the disciples that God was way more open-minded about people than they thought. They were still getting over the shock of having women disciples, then Jesus springs this on them.

If the people of Geresene were outsiders, alien, then the man who met them at the shore was even more so. In fact, to call him a man was even a stretch. He is filled with so many demons, legions of them, that they have wrecked his life and taken away from him everything it means to be human. They have stripped him of his family, his clothing, his sense of self, even his name. He lives among the dead, dragging his chains around with him, only half alive himself, at the mercy of his demons, who show no mercy. They have left him nothing, not his humanity, not his ability to care for himself, to be in community, not even the ability to ask for help.

But Jesus heals him anyway. Jesus saves him from his tormentors and restores everything that they have taken from him. He is made whole. And he didn't even have to ask. He didn't even have to know he needed it.

Sometimes we have the idea that God looks down imperiously on us, waiting for us to make the first move, holding back until we get to the breaking point and beg for help. Like waiting for the dog to do its trick before it gets its treat, God waits to step in until we prove that we are desperate enough, worth enough, ready enough.

But sometimes our demons are so strong, so legion that they keep us from calling out to God. The demons of addiction or even grief hold us hostage; they have come so close to destroying us that we don't even know how desperate we are. The powers of disease weaken us so badly that we don't even care; we don't have the strength to reach out for help. Depression convinces us that no one cares; no one can help us anyhow. Even the demons called pride or vanity can keep us from admitting that we need help, and asking for it.

And when that happens, when we can't get ourselves to God, God comes to us. There was a short article in Time Magazine this week about the progress being made in the treatment of HIV/AIDS, and the difficulty they've had treating it in Africa because access to health care is such a problem. There are clinics, and there are drugs available, but people have to walk miles, sometimes days to get to them. One of the things they've found is that if they can get little packets of medicine out to remote villages and administer it right away to babies born to HIV infected mothers, they stand a much greater chance of not becoming infected themselves.

That's what God is like, the mobile HIV clinics, or the book mobiles that brought libraries to kids who couldn't get to libraries. God comes to us when the demons keep us from coming to him.

Maybe you've known someone like that, someone who desperately needed God to step in, to help, to heal, to save. Maybe you've felt like that yourself at some point in your life, maybe even right now. Some demon has taken over your life and swallowed you to the point that you feel like you are only half alive, only a shadow of yourself and there's not enough of you left to call out for help.

You don't need to. God's attentive. God pays attention. You don't have to wave a flag in his face, you don't have to beg. God's far more compassionate, far more willing and able to save us from our demons than we think. God sees what you are going through, God knows when you

can't get up off your knees to utter a prayer, and will put you back together again; raise your life up from the Pit.

Lauren Winner tells the story of a woman in her church whom she describes as “a nice but cowering” sort of woman. She writes that, “If you were being polite, you would have described Mary as "sweet." If you were being a bit more honest, you would have said "deferential." If you were feeling a tad catty, you would say "simpering." She made Laura Bush look aggressive.” Mary’s husband died young, and for a while she was even more lost than she had been before. Winner describes her as a ‘whispery’ sort of person. But then someone from her church invited her to be a part of a ministry to battered women. And somehow, as unlikely a place for healing as it seemed, she blossomed through it. She was healed, saved through her work with abused women – but make no mistake about it, she was saved by God.

For some of us here this is a call to mission, at least at this moment in our lives. There are people out there who need healing, need saving. Some kind of demon has overwhelmed them and left them helpless, voiceless. They may not know it, but God does, and if you are watchful and attentive too, if you look for suffering, God will work his miracles through you. I’ve seen it happen.

For others here, I hope you hear the good news in this strange story of Legion, how God crosses over the divide between insiders and outsiders, life and death, and comes to our aid when we are barely hanging on. There is always, always hope.