

Total Transformation

Luke 8:26-39

Rev. Rick Hull ~ June 3, 2018 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

²⁶ Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me”— ²⁹ for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times 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 wilds.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. ³¹ They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

³² Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴ When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they 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 Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed.

³⁷ Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave 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.” So he went

away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him. (Luke 8:26-39)

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On a nameless day in the region of the Geresenes, one totally broken man got up from his fitful sleep and wandered out among the tombstones. It was sunrise and he shouted at the sun. There were passers-by and he scared them off. And then he wept for his uncontrollably dangerous, destructive life.

It was a real day, in a real place, in real time, and a real, life-saving miracle was about to unfold.

He was possessed. Not just maladjusted. He was genuinely and irretrievably owned by, and filled with the Satanic. He could have been a sensible, loving husband, father, and neighbor. That’s what God created him for. But, all of the evils of Satan are set to undo whatever God has created. And he was their poster-child!

Next door, the farmers shook their heads, and probably took a firmer grip on their weapons. They had pigs to raise. And he was at best an inconvenience, and at worst a threat to them, to their families, and certainly to their business. One more difficulty to be feared and avoided in a world filled with brokenness.

And then Jesus arrived on the beach with his crew. That many men disembarking there would attract attention. So they watched as He approached the unapproachable villain. And surprisingly, what the farmers saw there would cause more confusion and fear than anything the demoniac had done!

You see, they understood “*crazies*.” Some crazy people might strip naked and beat themselves up. But, this was more than that. And when Jesus could command the demons, perhaps He was a demon Himself. So, in their fear, they begged Him to just go away.

And in their fear, they had no clue about what we know, that this story is all about salvation, grace and rescue -- that Jesus' concern, first and foremost, and always, is the healing of souls and the transforming of lives! He is in the Transformation Business. And as His disciples, so are we!

He calls a broken man to Transformation. Then He calls us all to share the work of Transforming Lives! And so, this morning, I want to look over Jesus' shoulder, and ask two important questions.

The first is that famous nagging conundrum that always follows this story: ***"If God heals, and cares for creation ... then WHY did Jesus do that to those poor, defenseless pigs?"***

Several answers have been suggested: "Pigs are not Kosher, so he was justified -- proper folk do not eat pork!" -- "The people of the region cared more about their own wealth, raising pigs, than about a poor, desperate man ... so they probably deserved it!" -- "Jesus was showing that saving this man was more important than protecting their economy." Now, those rationalizations may or may not have some merit. But, I think there is something far more dramatic taking place here.

Let's examine the context: Luke 8 is all about TRANSFORMATION. In a series of four miracles, Jesus will transform a storm into calm ... transform a broken man and make him whole ... transform an uncontrolled hemorrhage and restore a woman's health ... and transform a dead body into a living, happy little girl. In every case, He is the Lord who lovingly does the "impossible"!

But, the demoniac's case is **unique!** Conquering weather, illness, and natural death *is* miraculous. But here, He is contending with forces that intend evil ... that act with evil ... and are enthusiastically destroying God's most beloved creation: His children. This is a huge contest, with enormous meaning for **every disciple!** And, that's where the pigs come in!

You see, without the pigs, themselves, being suddenly possessed and running down that hillside, we might not get it! We might not identify the demonic. And this could be just another healing.

Perhaps, as some have said, Jesus *is* just a good psychologist. He is just a therapist restoring stability to the crippled psyche, re-balancing the unbalanced with kindness.

But, if we believe that, we have utterly missed the point! The proof of the demonic is when the demons move. And the pigs, who had been quietly wallowing in the mud, rush en-mass, into the sea! Without that scene, we might miss the uniqueness of *this* transformation: that Jesus spoke to the evil ... and then mastered it. And, when He took authority -- ***Hell itself got up and ran!***

On that day, He stood toe-to-toe with all that was impossibly evil, and declared to the world that nothing, not even Satan himself, would stop Him from rescuing, saving, and changing the people that "God so loved!"

Now, you and I may not be directly facing demons -- though some of us have -- but we have our own catalogue of "impossibles." And, if He could do that with those demons, then He can confront any evil, any destruction, we face today. Friends, Easter was not over when we ate the last egg!

Do we believe that He is really alive ... really here ... really able? And do we dare to claim for ourselves our Lord's "salvation" -- the complete healing of the soul from the inside out?

And that brings us to the second huge question of Luke 8. ***"Does our Lord still transform our lives today ... and if so, how are we to participate in that saving grace?"*** Let me draw just a few practical suggestions out of Luke's account.

[1] IDENTIFY -- Make Three Vital Identifications!

First, we begin "identifying" by ***naming the evil!*** Call it what it is! Jesus addressed the demonic. He met the demons head-on. This Geresene situation really *is* demonic. My situation may not be demon-possession, but it helps to name the evil ... to unmask the destructive, or the difficult.

Let me offer a quick example: I teach speech at a Christian Junior High charter school, and the other day I was drawn into a discussion of alcohol abuse,

as another teacher addressed situations that these kids are exposed to.

When I was called on for an opinion, it struck me that this was the place to name the evil. I told them that the use of alcohol often destroys. And that our God of love is hugely angry about that. Out of a great love, He is furious with anything that destroys his children!

Now, out of context, this could sound extreme and self-righteous. But in that moment, the abuse of alcohol had to be named for what it is, and for how God sees it: evil, destructive, and often deadly.

The work of *identifying* begins with saying, "This really IS evil!"

Second, when the evil seems impossible, *identify personal inadequacy*. Name it. "*Apart from my Lord, my situation really is impossible! I cannot manage this alone.*" If we don't get that, we'll struggle on our own, and never turn to the love and the power of the Living Lord!

Are you facing something nearly impossible, that's eating you up right now? A marriage in irreconcilable trouble? A habit you can't break? Anger that just won't go away? Guilt that won't let go of you? An illness that rages out of control? Fear for your country, or your community, or your family?

Remember that we worship the Lord of Transforming Power! Can you and I name our need for divine intervention, and offer Him our impossibilities?

And then, third, *identify* what those disciples saw: the certainty of Jesus! (This really is evil. It really is impossible. But, Jesus really is here! If He is not here, then we might as well reduce Easter to chocolate bunnies! But, those men walked with a real live Lord. And so do you and I.

Now, this doesn't make the evil or the destructive disappear. But it does anchor our souls to a Lord who is larger than the evil! And THAT begins the saving transformation! That's the start.

[2] **BELIEVE** -- Believe that Jesus is not just hanging around. He is at work here and now!

I may not see it yet. I may not understand what He is doing. And He may not immediately explain Himself, but there is no graveyard of human life that is off limits to our Lord!

In the Geresene graveyard, the man was cured. Yet, closer to home, it can be very hard to believe that the hand of God is moving through the events of our lives. We look at the enormity of the situation and worry that nothing good can come of this or nothing can be done. "Sure, Jesus used to work miracles, but my demon is unchained and impossible!"

And so we wonder and doubt. And we begin to reduce Jesus to the status of "*a friend who hurts with us*" or "*a companion who walks with us*" or "*an example to follow.*" And we miss the truth that, as wonderful as all that is, He is cosmically unsatisfied with such minor status! **This is the Lord of Transformation!** This is the Lord who takes the broken and makes it whole. This is the Lord who doesn't just *cope* with impossibilities! He stands against them -- and transforms them!

We have a dear family member who is hopelessly addicted to alcohol and drugs. But wait a minute! We're talking here about the Lord of Transformation! Perhaps "*hopelessly*" is not ever an appropriate word to use. So we pray for Transformation, because we know a Living Lord, who is actively engaged in His world, and always, always accessible. And our on-going prayer is simply: "*Dear Lord, you can do it. However you do it, transform him!*"

Can we believe for that? Can we trust Him for His perfect will and greater purpose? Corrie Ten Boom used to share what she learned from her dying sister in the depths of the Nazi concentration Camp: that "***There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still!***" There is nothing in this life that can keep you and me *out of* the pit of the evil. But, nothing can keep our Lord out *either!* He is deeper still! And, just as the last word was not yet written for the man in the tombs, this moment now is not our end either. This is not the last word!

We saw what He did for a demoniac who was beyond hope! And when we cannot yet see our

own outcome, we can still believe in the Lord of the outcome!

Identify -- and call it what it is. Believe -- that He is at work here. And then:

[3] RELEASE -- Open up to the movement of the Lord.

The cry of the demons in verse 28 was also his own cry of anguish. *“Jesus, you are God! Oh, please stop the torment!”* Behind the voice of the demons, Jesus heard the cries of his heart! For this man, releasing meant crying out in surrender.

So, first, releasing means opening up to our Lord’s Authority.

Can He take command not just of the evils that surround us, but can He take command of US? Can He transform not just our situations, but can He transform US? That’s more of a challenge than we may at first imagine. Are we willing to change, to live differently, and submit our lives to His control?

Certainly, we’d surrender a crisis to Him. But can we also place our hopes, and our fears, and our future under His command? Are we willing to give Him everything — to say, *“Lord I am yours. Do with me as you will ...”*?

Jesus takes command. He blesses the demoniac with an overcoming miracle, and then, with the same authority, He also commands the man’s future! He sends him back home. Sometimes our Lord’s saving grace also means a change in our lives. Sometimes the release from pain or crisis will also mean making major and surprising re-adjustments. And, it can take courage to really “release” ... to accept God’s help and plans ... and then move into the new directions He may have for us.

Releasing also means opening up to Supernatural Care.

We sometimes think that believing in the supernatural is irresponsible, or embarrassingly simplistic. But we are in a spiritual battle here. As Ephesians 6 puts it: our struggle is *“against*

spiritual evils...” So, since we believe our Lord is alive and active, will we seek Him, and trust Him for His supernatural intervention?

A friend of mine shared a moving story of transformation. Jerry told me, “I was a helpless alcoholic. It was beyond anything I or my family could do about it, when I was drawn into Alcoholics Anonymous. I know now that ONLY supernatural intervention could have saved my life. Have you ever heard the summary of the first three AA steps? It’s three two-word statements: ‘I can’t -- He can -- Let Him!’”

Before Jerry went home to the Lord, he had become a sober pillar of the church, and a mentor to folks who thought they were beyond hope! Jerry discovered that “releasing” means coming to a point where we seek and welcome the supernatural work of God. *“I can’t, He can, Let Him!”*

And then, “releasing” is also welcoming the natural help that God sends.

This is where the Christian community shines! God used the people who cared for Jerry to urge him toward AA. And, his new desire to help people came from his personal experience of how God can work through others. So many of life’s deep needs are transformed when we become the hands and hearts of our Living Lord.

And this can shape our whole understanding of the real work of the Church! Our ministry becomes so much more than sustaining happy fellowships, or maintaining member rolls, or sponsoring interesting programs. Jesus made it clear that **Transformation** was his passion, and that total life-transformation is our Great Commission agenda!

Identify -- Believe -- Release. But, pause here for a minute. What about when our faith commitment doesn’t produce the hoped-for results?! Suppose the miracle takes a long time ... or is absolutely not the plan we had in mind ... and God seems to deny us the things we long for? *“What do I do in the real world of my troubles?”* There’s a Fourth Step.

[4] HANG ON -- And, know that there’s more going on here than we see!

We never see the whole picture at once. So, we keep turning to Him. We keep crying out, and keep Holding On!

Remember that Jesus is not finished! Even when the man is clothed and in his right mind, the miracle is only *half-over*! Jesus has bigger plans and more to do when the man goes home! More blessings will grow directly out of his situation!

We ask, “*Why am I in this mess?*” ... and then discover that it is often our Lord’s plan to use our situations, and even the evils we encounter, as the raw materials of blessings that will reach far beyond us! What happened to one broken Geresene will touch an entire community, and then become a witness to generations yet unborn!

No matter the size or shape of the crisis, we turn to our Lord and hang on! We may not clearly see the next step, but we would rather take that step with Him than without Him. And so, with a steely, and often pain-filled faith, we say, “*Lord, I do not understand this. I do not know all you are doing here. But please be glorified in it. I am holding on to you!*”

We want everything quickly. And quick doesn’t often happen. So, we hang on. We hope the pain will go away. And the pain persists. So, we hang on. We have a plan for life. And the plan is thwarted. So, we hang on.

Why do we hang on, when others might shy away? Let me quote Corrie again. She also said: “***You never know that all you need is Jesus, until all you have is Jesus.***” He was there for her in Hell. He released a poor Geresene from Hell. And, there is no Hell that can separate Him from **us** either!

So, in every concern or crisis, we take hold, and hang on to Him. We keep coming back. And we make her discovery: **He’s there!** — the one certainty we can always count on — the one fixed point in our unsettled universe!

What do you do when the evils seem to have the last word? You identify ... you believe ... you release ... and then you hang on to Him. Because whether it’s on a graveyard hillside, or in a Sacramento suburb, the demons never get the last word. Because *then and now* our Lord is the Lord

of salvation and transformation! *Then and now*, He is in the life-transforming business. And by the grace of God, *then and now*, **so are we!**

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Luke 8:26-39 again. What particularly speaks to you in this passage?
2. What do you think about Satan and demonic activity? Is it real, or are there other explanations? How do you account for the seemingly aggressive activity of evil all around us?
3. Jesus performed an incredible miracle. Do you think God still works this kind of miracle today? Or is this something that could only happen when Jesus walked on earth? Why or why not?
4. Rick said that “Jesus’ concern, first and foremost, and always, is the healing of souls and the transforming of lives. He is in the transformation business, and as His disciples, so are we.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
5. Are there evils that must be “named” which go unidentified while the more horrific evils catch our attention? How are these evils satanic in nature?
6. Does God still stand against evil? If so, how is He doing it? Is it working? Have you personally experienced an “evil” that challenged the ability to believe that God is at work?
7. Rick said that “releasing means opening up to our Lord’s authority.” Why is it sometimes so hard to release ourselves or our circumstances to God’s leading and His will?
8. “Releasing” also means “opening up to the natural help that God provides through Christian brothers and sisters.” What are some

ways that we can be more available to each other, and to our community, in transformational ministry?

9. The grip of Satan does not let go easily, and the evils we experience often do not resolve easily. What advice can you suggest to help us “hang on” when everything seems impossible?

Table to Table Question

A question for kids and adults to answer together

Jesus cared for many people who needed His help. Can we ask Him for help today? How do we do that?