

What might Jesus do for you?

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Good morning, Church! Whether we are gathered in the sanctuary of this building, or in the sanctuary of our homes, we share one purpose, and that is to worship and praise our Lord of All.

And because this Sunday is also Father's Day, let's offer our thanks for all those persons who father children through love and instruction and support. Happy Father's Day, everyone!

Jesus certainly serves as a model of how to honor two fathers, doesn't he? His human father showed a child how to listen for God's leading and how to protect the vulnerable at any cost. I'm thinking of how Joseph chose to support Mary's pregnancy, after despite any cultural criticisms. Joseph also chose to migrate to Egypt with his young family to keep them safe from human authorities seeking to kill Jesus. Joseph heard from angels on both occasions—and Joseph followed what God said to do through those angelic visions.

I believe those are family stories that would be shared as testimonies, don't you? Don't be shy about sharing with children how God leads us to act in surprising ways! Jesus also learned his human father's carpentry skills, and worked as a carpenter until his time of ministry became his primary focus.

- Can you name something an adult acting like a father taught you?
- Is this something you still do?

Jesus also shows us how to honor God and follow God's leading throughout the very public ministry that Jesus lived. How do we learn about this? Someone or several persons led us to the powerful book that has God's story from Creation through Revelation. What's the name of that book? Yes, the Bible. Where do we often encounter bible stories? Yes. In our homes and in our churches. Let's not be shy in either place about sharing the importance of those stories, poems, letters, and histories.

Today we are going to look closely at a letter and at a gospel lesson. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, that highly educated apostle explains to the Galatians, and to us, how justification by faith supersedes a reliance on following Old Testament laws. Paul essentially says in Galatians 23-29 that the Old Testament laws were important to help discipline humans who were prone to sin—until the advent of Jesus Christ.

Those who work with children, as well as adults, may relate to how laws—or rules or policies—benefit the group, as well as the individual. We see this in team sports, in behaviors deemed

appropriate or not appropriate in our homes, and in actions and speech that either build a sense of community, or tear them apart.

- Are you with me? Can you think of examples in our times where the rule of law is helpful?
- Are you able to offer examples of events where the effects of lawlessness are evident?

We are as fully human and prone to sin as any characters between the covers of our bibles. But, we are also as fully human and able to choose faith in Jesus as the many examples in our bibles.

According to the apostle Paul, once Jesus Christ lived among humans, died on the cross, and rose to reign beside God, every human on earth is offered the same gift. That gift is to choose faith in Christ and become part of God's family. And every human means exactly that! Paul uses the major divisions of his time and says it like this in Gal. 28: *"There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."*

Isn't this what we strive to be as a church? Those who love their church often describe the people inside the walls as family. Paul reminds us that there are no walls that can divide those who love and believe in Jesus! How does this work? We are going to see this in action in Luke's gospel story about the first time that Jesus set forth into the territory of the Gentiles. If you have your bible, please open it now to Luke 8:26.

Up until these verses in the book of Luke, Jesus has been in ministry throughout Galilee. For those who enjoy sports, we might say that Jesus had the home field advantage. The story that comes right before today's lesson showed Jesus upping his game. When a storm blew up on the sea of Galilee, while Jesus was sleeping, the disciples had to wake him up with their fears of imminent death. Jesus spoke to the wind and the waves—to nature—and the stormy waves and strong winds quieted right down.

And how did the disciples react? Pay attention, please. Their reaction foreshadows events in today's story! Verse 25 says, "They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'" Can we answer this? Would we be any less afraid and amazed?

Reading in Luke 8:26, we see Jesus and his disciples traveling from Jewish territory to land identified as the country of the Gerasenes. This group arrived in Gentile territory. And perhaps to emphasize how utterly terrifying and wild this may seem to the disciples, the first Gentile they encounter is a naked man full of demons. This man lives in tombs, among dead people. Do we think he needs to meet Jesus!? Why might the disciples need to witness this? Why might we?!

Are any among us thinking of demon-possessed men who show up in grocery stores, schools, and churches? Are these men, like the Gerasene demoniac, essentially locked into cells of death? What might Jesus, Lord of Creation, do for them? For you? For me?

Verse 28 makes it clear that Jesus, not the demon-possessed naked man, is in charge here. Read with me.... "When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him...." That's the action of a subject before the Ruler of the Universe. Evil knows its limits. It may freely roam tombs of the dead, but at the feet of Jesus, evil falls flat. I hope this is encouraging to you. Evil also recognizes Jesus as God's Son.

The first words out of the man's mouth are shouted supplications. "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me- ...." This Gentile, living more like an animal than a person, knows who and whose he faces in this moment.

The numerous demons inside this man are able to break chains and make him unfit for the company of other humans. They can remove him from community, but they cannot remove him from the inherent majesty of God's presence in Jesus. These demons cannot break the compassion and power of Jesus. Are you humming, "There's Something about that Name"? Me, too! Are you feeling glad to be in worship, among others who love and know Jesus? Me, too!

I am certain that Rev. Dr. Nicholas Perry has proclaimed that each of God's children is loved, is sought, and is called by name. Amen? Here is Jesus in verse 30, asking "What is your name?" The answer is unusual, just like the circumstances. Instead of Joseph, or Saul, or David, or even Goliath, the name that is offered is "Legion". That's a plural noun. It signifies the infestation of many demons inside this human body. And those demons are begging for mercy! In verse 31 we read. "They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss."

It must be horrible in the abyss. And Jesus clearly has the power to send them back where they came from. But the power in Jesus builds from creating and loving, not from isolating and tormenting. Please, please pay attention whenever you witness a human who seems to enjoy tormenting animals and vulnerable people. That is evil in training! That behavior needs to be called out and healed before it grows any stronger.

Instead of sending the dispossessed demons back to the abyss, Jesus gives them permission to enter a large herd of swine...hogs by another name. Animals that Jews do not eat, right? And perhaps proving the death focus of demons, when the demons left the man and entered the swine, that herd "rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned." V. 33

Demons kill. Do not invite them into your home. Watch for words that demonize others, that promise things instead of the fruits of the spirit, words that target other humans. Strap on the armor of God and remember how Jesus seeks to save everyone— even the demonized, naked, and trapped among the tombs.

We see it right here, in Luke 8: 34. “When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 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.”

God be praised! Do you think his family and neighbors might be thrilled? Might be ready to welcome him home? Might be ready to offer supper to Jesus, a place to sleep, an offering toward future ministry?

No, that’s not the end of this story. Remember how the disciples reacted to Jesus calming the forces of nature? Ending the storm on the lake? Probably saving their lives that day? Remember? “They were afraid and amazed...” The disciples didn’t feel too comfortable with what they witnessed. This kind of power is not anything humans can control, even if some think they might like to try it. That kind of power changes everything. And who enjoys a total change? Especially the kind of change that happens in an instant...

Bombs drop on your city, a gunman walks into a classroom, a doctor tells you that tumors are in your brain, someone who could be your family member or neighbor is out-of-control and you’ve become comfortable with “out of sight, out of mind”....

Not one person is immune from catastrophe. No one can count on the status quo continuing. Like the disciples, then, and perhaps like many throughout our land and our world, “all the people of the surrounding country of the Gesarenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear.” Luke 8: 37. Fear--not faith-- is ruling over these people.

Is this the end of the story?! Absolutely not! Jesus and the disciples may cross back into the territory for their ministries, but Jesus has empowered that former victim into disciple of Christ Jesus. When the man begs to go with Jesus, Jesus commissions him for ministry right there among his Gentile neighbors. Jesus says, “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.” V.39

Is fear ruling where you live? What might you do? Have you met Jesus and offered your name? Are you willing to be transformed? What might Jesus do for you? And what might you do for Jesus?