

“For a long time, he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs.” Luke 8:27b

He doesn't even have a name.

He is surrounded by
pages and chapters and verses,
filled with a tradition
where names carry meaning,
like *Moses* means, *to draw out of water*,
and *Adam* comes from the Hebrew word
for ground, *adamah*,
where *Joshua* and *Jesus* mean, *he saves*;
and this man has no name.

When Jesus asks,

the man answers with what possess him
or with what occupies him,
'my name is *Legion for we are many*.'
David Lose sees this
as a heartbreaking moment,
a man so far gone,
his identity is known only
by the hoard of demons
that have taken him over.¹

Luke's gospel (and Mark's) describe

the Gerasene Demoniac
in vivid, frightening detail.

He sounds terrifyingly mad.

The Boo Radley of the New Testament;
only we know Boo wore clothes
and was a gentle giant.

The Gerasene man we encounter in this story,
makes us uneasy.

Uneasy because we don't really
talk about demons and possession
in our worship hour

¹ David Lose, Legion <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=2609>

on Sunday mornings.
We read this nowadays and say,
that the ancients really didn't understand
mental illness the way we do today.
We're better at taking care of it now.

Lucy Turner, one our former associate pastors
told me the story of how one Sunday morning,
at her large, downtown mostly white
Presbyterian church in Birmingham, Alabama,
a woman off the street,
(she was a known prostitute and addict)
—wearing hardly a thing:
a neon pink spandex dress
and 6 in. heels,
came through the narthex doors,
clicking her way down the long slate floor aisle.
She was both muttering and shouting
as if she was talking to someone in particular
when she threw herself
at the steps of the chancel wailing loudly,
“I want to be pure again, Jesus!”
Followed by a quick,
“No you don't!”
“I want to be pure again!”

I mean we just don't know what to do
with this alarming display
of our brother, our sister,
taken over by something
beyond their control.
So often we offer them the margins,
somewhere out of sight, out of mind.
We offer them the edges of community
where no one has to be
caught off guard by who they are.

According to Luke,
Jesus had just
calmed the stormy sea and winds
on the sea of Galilee
—commanding the waves and wind
to be still.

The disciples are shocked—
wondering about Jesus's identity,
“Who then is this,
that he commands even the winds and the water,
and they obey him?” (Lk.8:25)

Their reaction is odd;
how do they not know who Jesus really is;
how do they not know
what Jesus can do?

Because as soon as Jesus
stepped from the boat and onto the land
this man knows what Jesus can do.

Just Jesus's presence on land,
strikes fear in the demons
making the man's knees buckle in submission
—as he shouts at the top of his lungs,
“What have you to do with me,
Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”

It is an echo of Gabriel's announcement
to Mary in Luke 2,
'you will call him Jesus
and he will be the Son of the Most High God.'
There is no wondering
about who Jesus is;
it is should be obvious what Jesus can do...

So what do you do with a naked man in a graveyard?
Did he choose to live there in the shadows
or was he driven to live in the tombs?
Who would want to live among the dead?

He has no home,
other than the desecrated shore of graves,
where he wildly shouts
and in Mark's gospel,
he bruises himself with stones.
The town's people were likely used to him
"going off the deep end," so to speak.
Surely they knew his name.
Oh that wailing, that is just Crazy Tom.
That screaming must be Looney Bill
—we had a Wild Bill
that lived in our neighborhood in Hillcrest;
but his corner was hardly the edge of the neighborhood...

I wonder about this man with no name,
don't you?
Why didn't he have clothes?
Had he ripped them off?
Was he sensitive to certain fabrics,
the way my kids don't like the way
a wool sweater feels
or my friend Buz
who won't wear jeans
because he doesn't like
the feel and weight of denim?
It strikes me that he's naked—
it strikes me quite frankly,
because our God, you know,
is a seamstress.²

Think back to Adam and Eve the garden:
having sinned their eyes were opened
and they knew they were naked
and hid from God.
The consequence of what happened
with the tree, the fruit, the serpent,
it was devastating.

² This comes from the TheoEd Talk with Lauran Winner, Magnolia Trees and Cardigan Sweaters: Unexpected Metaphors for God, <https://vimeo.com/258838358> ; <https://theoed.com/watch>

But it did not mean abandonment *by* God,
but more of something like a distance *from* God.

And with of that devastating distance,
the warm, comfortable, sheltered reality
shattered
and brought Adam and Eve into
a colder, exposed and fearful world,
where our loving God makes them clothes.

“For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs.”

Wendell Berry writes, “Practice resurrection.”³

And there always has to be a death
for there to be resurrection.

Is that what we have here?

Is this not practicing resurrection
when Christ is able to bring a man
out from the graves and tombs,
out from the dead,
from being buried alive
deep inside his own self
and then freeing him,
resurrecting him,
clothing him as if he knew
how cold, exposed and fearful the man was?

The beauty of course

is that Jesus too is, a seamstress;
Jesus clothes the man.

Jesus casts out from him sure death
and restores him to life.

That is the beauty of resurrection.

The irony in this story

is that the man is a Gentile.

³ Wendell Berry, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1973. Also published by Counterpoint Press in *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*, 1999; *The Mad Farmer Poems*, 2008; *New Collected Poems*, 2012. <https://cals.arizona.edu/~steidl/Liberation.html>

Luke's narrative is clear
about locating this story geographically for us,
"Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes,
which is opposite Galilee." (Lk. 8:26)

Opposite Galilee—just what is
this Jewish rabbi doing
on the other side of sea?

This is the only time
in Luke's gospel
that Jesus ventures into 'Gentile territory,
and the only instance
of his ministry taking place
outside of the boundaries
of the community of the Jews
or God-fearers like the centurion
who servant was healed.'⁴

The demons are banished
and the towns people come to see
what has taken place
after a herd of pigs
are drowned in the ocean,

"they came to Jesus, [and]
they found the man from whom
the demons had gone
sitting at the feet of Jesus,
clothed and in his right mind." (Lk.8:35)

He is clothed and in his right mind
—not chained and yelling;
not naked and wild;
he is clothed and in his right mind
—in his resurrection there is his salvation.

⁴ Sharon H. Ringe, Luke (Westminster Bible Companion, Louisville, KY 1995) pg. 119

When Jesus freed him from Legion
The man was healed right then and there
and was restored
back into his neighborhood.

So what was it about that man?
Actually I don't have a solid answer
—I wasn't there.
But if this is where we find Jesus,
even just this once,
opposite of where he should be
then I am relieved.

Because if the Son of the Most High God
can decide to go
where no one but a legion of demons
might know his name;
if he can decide to go there
and heal someone's innermost torment
and restore him to the community,
if he can go opposite of Galilee
and practice resurrection
then salvation is for everyone.

When the man begged to go with Jesus;
oddly Jesus says 'no.'
Isn't that strange?

Usually Jesus is welcoming everyone
to come and follow him;
leave father and mother,
cast aside your fishing nets
and come fish for people...
but here the man is told to stay put.

“Return to your home,
and declare how much God has done for you.’
So he went away.
Proclaiming through the city
how much Jesus had done for him.” (Lk.8:39)

In an instant—even before Pentecost,
the Spirit, like the wind,
is blowing where she wants to.
The Gerasene man
becomes part of the Jesus movement,
an apostle to the Gentiles;
and salvation is social:
the whole point of God’s healing and liberation
is to restore us to beloved community,
to return us to neighborhood, [to Eden]
and to call us back to life!⁵

Jesus has been busy
bringing God’s kingdom in Luke,
“he casts out or silences demons
who proclaim him as Son of God (4:31-37);
he heals the sick with fever (4:38-39),
leprosy (5:12-16),
paralysis (5:17-21);

he raises the dead (7.11-15);
he is proclaimed as a prophet (7 16-17);
he enters into conflict with the Pharisees
over his proclamation of the forgiveness of sins (5.21-26);
and he teaches the crowds with authority (6.12-49).”⁶

Christ has been busy
bringing the work of God’s kingdom into full view.
And with the Gerasene Demoniac
the implication is that this kingdom
might be bigger
than just one place, one region,
one people,
because now salvations is in full view too.

⁵ <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2019/6/18/the-beautiful-struggle-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-second-week-after-pentecost>

⁶ Stanley Harstine, An Exegesis of the Character Jesus in Luke 8 Review and Expositor 97, Fall 2000
<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=3f2ff996-87c1-432a-943d-0f63f217fc6a%40sessionmgr4008>

The salvation that comes with the kingdom
isn't only just for the interior castle,
it is for the everyone and everything
even the world's empires.

Salvation came to this naked man
in the graveyard and clothed him
and restored him to life.

It's God's story reimagined
and retold again and again.

The man was then was sent out to proclaim
the good news to his place and his time;
to declare that this meant
salvation was for him,
and for his community.

And this man knew
what it was like to live in a community of fear.
He knew what it was like
to have good news to proclaim
when everyone around
was suspicious and fearful
of what salvation
and liberation might mean for them.

But he "...proclaim[s] throughout the city
how much Jesus had done for him."

Then the story stops.

I want there to be more.
I want to hear how
the town was changed by the gospel.
How the townspeople reacted
when this man wouldn't stop talking
about his resurrection,
his salvation.

And then I realize
that maybe that's why
he doesn't have a name.
Because I've got it backwards.

Who is *this* man...
that even the winds, and the water,
and the demons obey him?⁷

Benediction

“For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs.”

The story of the man Jimmy caught in church trying on our “clothes”

⁷ Stacy Simpson Duke, Luke 8:26-29, The Truett Pulpit, <https://blogs.baylor.edu/truettpulpit/2016/06/08/luke-826-39/>