

**LUKE 8:26–39.** (EHV)

They sailed down to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, a man from the town met him. He was possessed by demons and for a long time had not worn any clothes. He did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before him, and said with a loud voice, “What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torment me!” For Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. In fact, the unclean spirit had seized him many times. He was kept under guard, and although he was bound with chains and shackles, he would break the restraints and was driven by the demon into deserted places. Jesus asked him, **“What is your name?”** He said, “Legion,” because many demons had gone into him. They were begging Jesus that he would not order them to go into the abyss. A herd of many pigs was feeding there on the mountain. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. The demons went out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. When those who were feeding the pigs saw what happened, they ran away and reported it in the town and in the countryside. People went out to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet. He was clothed and in his right mind, and the people were afraid. Those who saw it told them how the demon-possessed man was saved. The whole crowd of people from the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were gripped with great fear. As Jesus got into the boat and started back, the man from whom the demons had gone out begged to be with him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, **“Return to your home and tell how much God has done for you.”** Then he went through the whole town proclaiming what Jesus had done for him.

I’m sure all of you are familiar with the concept of getting a whoopin’. In fact, I’m guessing that most of you are personally familiar with that concept because, like me, you got plenty of whoopins as a kid, or if you are a child, maybe you got a whoopin’ this past week. Just to be clear, I’m not talking about senseless, excessive beatings, but about legitimate slaps or spankings given by your parents as just punishment for sin, to teach us to associate sin with pain, so that we would view sin as the horrible thing it is.

But you’re probably also familiar with the phrase, “get a whoopin’,” being used in other contexts, such as in sports and wars. For instance, the book of Judges tells how Gideon and a mere 300 men went up against an army of Midianites and other allies who numbered about 135,000. But even though they were vastly outnumbered—450:1—the Midianites got whooped. They were so scared when Gideon’s men blew their trumpets and broke their jars in the middle of the night, that they turned on each other with their swords and then went scampering for their lives. Nearly everyone in the enemy forces was either killed or captured, while Gideon didn’t lose a single man. That’s a whoopin’.

We hear about a similar showdown in our Gospel text today, only Jesus is even more outnumbered than Gideon was. Plus, he wasn’t outnumbered by enemy soldiers; he was

outnumbered by enemy demons, forces in the devil's army. Yet this isn't a tragic account; it's a delightful and comforting one, because Jesus gives the devil's forces a whoopin'.

## 1.

Jesus gives the devil's forces a whoopin', in spite of their great number and their hostility.

Jesus and his disciples sailed across to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, to a place near where a steep bank went down to the lake. As Jesus stepped onto the shore, he was greeted by quite a sight. A certain man who was possessed by demons, plural, came to meet him, and it appears that he was either naked or that he was very insufficiently clothed, and that he had been that way for some time. Matthew actually tells us that there were two such men, but Mark and Luke only tell us about one. Perhaps only one of the men interacted with Jesus after they were cleansed and was also the one to spread the good news about Jesus. So perhaps that is why Mark and Luke only talk about him. Whatever the case, we'll only focus on the one because Luke only focuses on the one.

Now the demons who were possessing this man were having quite a time with him, and I don't mean a good time. First, the fact that there were multiple demons possessing this one man speaks all by itself to the character of the demons. Imagine seeing one man beating another helpless man, and instead of trying to stop him or even just ignoring him, you go over and join him. Imagine seeing five men, ten men, fifty men beating a helpless man, and thinking, "Seems like they could use another"! We have a saying, "Don't kick a man when he's down," but that's exactly what these demons did. Or maybe it was a little different. As Jesus begins interacting with this man, it becomes clear that there is a demon who is in charge, a commander demon. Perhaps this commander demon ordered the demons in his command to join him in possessing and tormenting this one man. But even if that was the case, they didn't refuse. They gladly followed their orders and piled on—as glad as demons can be, anyway.

And just look how they piled on! Luke tells us this man hadn't been close to being properly dressed for a long time. Moreover, he didn't stay in a house, but in the tombs. When I was growing up in a town in Wisconsin similar to the size of Winner, there was a "bag lady." She was an older woman who lived on the outskirts of town and whenever she came walking into town, she was always carrying around a bunch of plastic bags. I and other people in the town talked about her way too much as it was. Can you imagine how she would have been talked about if she lived in the cemetery? Who sleeps among dead people? This man possessed by demons did.

Many times the commander demon, together with his underlings, forcibly seized this man and imposed his will on him. Mark tells us that the man spent much of his time among the tombs and in the hills crying out and cutting himself with stones. Matthew tells us he was so violent that no one could pass that way, so apparently the demons had used him to do physical harm to others. As a result, people had tried to bind him with chains and shackles hand and foot, and to keep him under guard, but he would break the chains and return to haunt the tombs and other deserted places.

Who knows what he ate. Who knows what his hair and teeth were like. Who knows what his body looked like. Who knows what he smelled like. Can you even imagine living a life like this?

As unpleasant and disgusting as it is to imagine someone living a life like this, Jesus wants you to imagine it. Jesus wants you to see this man. This is what the devil and his forces want for you and for me. Whenever they tempt you to sin, whether it's a comparatively big sin like thinking little of church and God's word or not believing God's word or lying to your parents or adultery or murder, or a comparatively little sin like using foul language or laughing at a dirty joke or provoking your sister or speeding, this is what they're after. They want to plunge you into misery and wretchedness. The horror movie genre has never been bigger or more popular in our country than it is right now. People think the occult is entertaining and harmless. But if the devil and his demons could have their way with you, this is what your life would look like. And this is just an infinitesimally small fraction of the real misery and wretchedness that they want you to suffer eternally in hell.

If you saw someone who lived a life like this coming toward you, how would you react? I don't know about you, but I'd probably turn around, push the boat back out to sea, and climb back in. But Jesus holds his ground. He isn't afraid. It's like he expected to meet this man. He realizes that this man possessed by demons is approaching him like a moth is drawn to the flame that will kill it. He's about to give the devil's forces a whoopin'.

## 2.

Then Jesus does give the devil's forces a whoopin'—and he does it merely with his word. Mark tells us that Jesus told him, "Come out of this man, you unclean spirit!" It appears that Jesus knew that if the commander left, he would take the others with him.

And look at this commander demon. After everything he has done to this man to ruin his life, after all his evil and terrifying demonstrations of power, he doesn't respond to Jesus, "Come out of this man? Why don't you make me!" No, he becomes a pathetic, whimpering guttersnipe as soon as Jesus speaks. "What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torment me!"

The commander demon knows that he has to obey. He has to leave his host. There is no resisting this warrior. There is no escaping the whoopin' of his Word. But the demon tries to bargain with Jesus before obeying. He knows he has to leave, but Jesus has not specified a destination. He is hoping that he will not have to go into the abyss or, as Matthew puts it, to be tortured before the appointed time.

Now of course, just as all the angels are residents of heaven even as they are carrying out God's will on earth, so also all the demons are residents of the Abyss, or hell, even as they are tempting and tormenting people on earth. So they don't derive any real pleasure from their work. They are as tormented as those they are tormenting. They are already bound with everlasting chains. Yet there is an even worse torture and torment awaiting them than that they are already experiencing, namely on Judgment Day. The apostle Paul even says that we believers will get to participate in this judgment and sentencing of the demons (1 Cor. 6:3). This demon does not want to have to face that judgment early. He wants to stay in the area.

It is now that Jesus asks him his name. He obviously already knows his name. When Jesus asks questions he already knows the answer to, he is doing so for the benefit of his audience, not for his own benefit. The commander demon replies that his name is Legion because of the many demons with him under his command. Before Jesus tells these demons

where to go, he wants the disciples who are watching, and us, to know that he is not dealing with just one demon, but with many.

Just how many demons were under this commander demon? The commander demon says his name is Legion. There were close to 6,000 soldiers in a Roman legion at this time, and later these demons go into a herd of 2,000 pigs. Even if this commander was exaggerating to try to make him and his forces look bigger and stronger than they were, there had to be many demons to get an entire herd of 2,000 pigs to rush down the steep bank into the water. If there was one demon per pig, that would mean 2,000 demons. 2,000:1! Do you like those odds? Yet the entire legion now joins their commander in begging Jesus repeatedly not to order them into the abyss. They don't even think about trying to jump him or defy him.

Finally, the demons glance over and see a large herd of pigs—animals that God had designated as unclean for his Old Testament people—feeding there on the hillside. They beg Jesus to let them go into those pigs instead of being sent to their ultimate punishment prior to Judgment Day. And Jesus does let them go into the pigs. So they finally exit the man they have been torturing and tormenting. They exit at Jesus's word.

Think about that! 2,000:1, but not even a contest when the one is Jesus, when the one is his Word. After considering how evil the devil's intentions are for you, do you see how necessary it is for you to gather around Jesus's word regularly, to receive Jesus's word regularly? Do you see what a joy and delight it is? What comfort and strength it gives us?

### 3.

Now as you see the demons rushing for the pigs, don't think that these demons have successfully negotiated with Jesus. Don't think that they had something on Jesus that forced him to ease up on what he was originally intending to do to them. Jesus only grants the request of these demons for his own purposes—not only to show us the whoopin' he gives to the devil's forces through his Word, but also to show us that he gives the devil's forces a whoopin' with human beings in mind, with us in mind, for our benefit.

After all, what does the formerly demon-possessed man see as the 2,000 demons rush out of him, or perhaps 1,000 out of him and 1,000 out of his companion? He can hear their shrieks moving toward the herd of pigs, then the herd of pigs begins to stir and move—toward the end of the hill on which they are feeding. Then without hesitating, over the edge, down to the bank, into the water, and drowned—the whole lot of them.

And what does that man get to reflect on as his sanity and the powers of his mind return to him? “Those demons that were in me killed those pigs instantly! That's what they wanted to do to me! That's what they would have done to me if they had been given the chance! But they weren't able to. Why? Because of this man—Jesus, the Son of the Most High. Because of his Word. Because he came over here to rescue me. Because I was more precious to him than 2,000 pigs. All life is precious to him, but given the choice, he would much rather see 2,000 animals die than one human soul, than my soul.”

Yes, this is the only time we know of that Jesus came to this specific location in his entire ministry. He knew what the devil's forces were doing to this man. He knew what this man was going through, the kind of life he was leading. And he couldn't stand it any longer. The devil's forces needed a whoopin', so that this man's soul could be saved.

But note! He doesn't just care about this man's soul. He didn't just come over for this man. When all the residents in the area hear about what has happened and come to see for themselves—see this demon-possessed man now dressed and sitting at Jesus's feet in his right mind, feeling better than he's ever felt before—they are terrified and beg Jesus to leave them! How foolish! How irrational! What should Jesus do? Call down curses on them? Rain down fire and brimstone on them?

No, he quietly heeds their wishes—but not before leaving them a witness. “As Jesus got into the boat and started back, the man from whom the demons had gone out begged to be with him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, ‘Return to your home and tell how much God has done for you.’ Then he went through the whole town proclaiming what Jesus had done for him.” Jesus gives the devil's forces a whoopin' not just in order to save this man. He came over to save this man, so that through this man's witness he might also give the forces of the devil that were blinding the minds of these people a whoopin', so that they would be saved too.

What seas did Jesus sail over to bring his devil-whoopin' word to you and me—you and me whose minds are as equally blinded by nature as the minds of these Gerasenes? Some of you no doubt have some interesting stories. Some of yours maybe not as interesting—maybe it's as simple as your parents bringing you to be cleansed from sin in baptism the Sunday after you were born. But that's still a devil-whoopin' story. And if you didn't have a very interesting story, your parents did. Or their parents or ancestors did. Plus, did you ever stop to think about the fact that there wouldn't have been a minister to baptize you or to share God's word with you, if Jesus hadn't first given a whoopin' to the devil's forces that were controlling the man who eventually became your minister or your parents' or grandparents' minister? Pastors and teachers and evangelists and missionaries weren't always public ministers; they needed saving too. Jesus saved them too, not just because he cared about them, but also because he cared about the people to whom they would minister.

Today, here I am, telling you about how Jesus whoops the devil's forces—whooped them, in his amazing way, by his own death, and sealed the whooping by his resurrection. Today, here I am, telling you about how much Jesus has done for me, about how much God has done for me, because Jesus is God, and about how much he has done for you. Listen to his Word. Rejoice in his Word. Cling to his Word. It's a devil-whooper, and it's a soul-saver. Amen.