Sermon from
August 30, 2026
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
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Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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Near the shore of Gerasene was a place of death and decay. It was a place of screams and howls, of shackles and chains. It was no place anyone would choose to be, a place no one would enter- that is unless you're Jesus. Jesus chose to go there. Jesus got in a boat and sailed to that specific shore. Immediately upon his arrival, he was greeted by chaos and evil. A man with a crazed look in his eyes, who "lived with the daily unraveling of his mind and was tortured by voices which impelled him to violently self-harm," (Sanctified Art resources) fell at the feet of Jesus and begged that he refrain from tormenting him. The voice was not natural. It had an echo and depth of many, not one. As Jesus asked for a name, we learn the man is possessed by a legion of demons. In Roman military language that is 6000 soldiers. This was a force of evil no one had been able to control or contain. The man had broken every chain and shackle attempting to bind him. He remained outside the city among the tombs, isolated from the land of the living.

Jesus showed no fear in the face of evil and chaos.

We can talk about modern-day understandings of mental health disorders or even our nation's incarceration practices. And there would certainly be correlations. Maybe we could label this man with a diagnosis of multiple personality disorder or even sociopathic behaviors. That would perhaps help us identify what Jesus encountered. But that would also limit our thinking to the emotional and the intellectual. What Jesus encountered was from the spiritual realm of evil, of the demonic. We don't really want to talk about that, but what Jesus encountered relates to our prayer we say every week of "deliver us from evil." As much as we might try to explain it away in rational terms, evil exists. And that's scary of course, but Jesus shows no fear in the face of evil and chaos. In fact, he seemed calm and collected. He knew he was the One who had power over evil. He was confident in his power to confront and defeat the legion oppressing the man of Gerasene. And the legion knew he could do it too.

Jesus sent the demons into a herd of swine, scripture tells us. And in the next scene, we read that the man is clothed and in his right mind. Jesus sits with him. Even in this place of death and decay, Jesus brings life and healing. The chains and shackles have been removed. The screams and howls replaced by peace and a quieted mind. Jesus calmly wove together sanity and serenity. One would think the townspeople would be happy; that in seeing the man healed and free of the unclean spirits they would be relieved and thankful. That is not what happened. In Isaac Villegas' article on this text, he writes, "His city refuses to

celebrate his freedom; the residents do not welcome him. They see him, clothed and in his right mind, and they are afraid (8:35). The people fear this healed man, now that demons no longer possess him and chains no longer shackle him. The liberated man sees familiar faces on the streets, memories of trauma, the inhospitable gaze of the public. Panic spreads through the population at the sight of the unbound prisoner." It must've been difficult to believe healing was full and complete. I think, like the townspeople, we have trouble sometimes trusting that a person has changed; that the transformation is real. We fear those who "used to be" a certain way, not allowing for new life to emerge. The townspeople were afraid. So much so that they begged Jesus to leave. So much so that the man now healed and in his right mind didn't want to stay. Jesus unraveled what the community knew; what they feared. Sometimes evil is what we become accustomed to. Sometimes, we convince ourselves we're able to control the chaos and remove the threat on our own. We're not. We need Jesus. Jesus shows no fear in the face of evil and chaos. Will we trust Jesus or send him away? Are we afraid of evil or afraid of the divine?

The Divine demands more of us, expects more from us. Jesus came to Gerasene and turned things upside down; casting out a legion of evil residing in one man's life and in doing so disrupted the status quo. Then he left at the request of the townspeople. The man whose identity in the eyes of the city was bound to what had been, now was left to pick up the pieces and proclaim all that God had done in his life. And he did. Scriptures says he proclaimed the good news throughout the Decapolis and people were amazed.

I wonder though if the man was accepted back into the community. I wonder if someone took a risk and hired him. I wonder if his family believed and trusted him to be safe. Was he invited to dinner? Did others engage him in conversation? Did anyone give him a hug or even shake his hand? Was he able to trust his own transformation without Jesus there to encourage? Maybe he traveled throughout the Decapolis because his own community never really received him. Jesus freed him from the evil that consumed him, but left it in the hands of the community to decide what happened next.

All summer we've been talking about Seeking God When Our Plans Fall Apart. We've been discussing what it feels like when life unravels and God begins weaving something new with the scraps. We've learned from Sarah's story that God can do the unbelievable and surprise us with unexpected joy. We learned from Peter that even in moments of doubt and uncertainty, God is there to pull us up and lift us out of our fear. We learned from Ruth and Naomi that in the face of unimaginable grief and loss, God can still weave something beautiful and lasting. We learned from the oppressive story of Hebrew slavery at the hands of the Egyptian Pharaoh, that while humans attempt to unravel God's plans for justice, God keeps working. We learned from Saul's conversion that God gives us a new name, but we have to live into it. We learned that while our dreams might unravel, God instructs us to make a life and plant gardens, seeking the good of our communities. We learned from the Samaritan woman at the well that Jesus is capable of unraveling all our shame, offering us springs of life in return. We learned that like Moses' mother, sister, and Pharaoh's daughter, sometimes we need act on behalf of another and step into the river to get them

to safety. God calls us to participate. We learned from Job, that while everything might fall apart and all semblance of life be lost, God offers us healing through the wonder of creation and challenges us to love what we can't control and receive it all as grace. And finally, today, we learn that even in the face of terrifying evil, Jesus shows no fear. In fact, Jesus is the only one with the power to bring about transformation and life in the dead and decaying places of our lives. When chaos and evil threaten to unravel our sanity, Jesus sits with us, clothes us with peace and gives us a right mind. When the ripples of evil continue to weigh on a community, Jesus gives strength to do what is right, instructing us to proclaim all God has done.

Everything that we experience as life falling apart is hard and painful and can be debilitating at times. And yet, as believers and followers of Jesus, we trust that all the pieces fall into the faithful and loving hands of God.

At one point this week, I felt my life begin to unravel. On Wednesday evening I got a call no parent wants to receive. It was from the ER nurse in Ames, Iowa, telling me that my son Krister had been hit by a car while riding his bike to work. Fear and anxiety threatened to unravel me and shake my reality. And then, the doctor got on the line and assured me he was in stable condition, that miraculously he had no broken bones or internal injuries or bleeding on the brain which was initially the concern. They were putting stitches in his nose, he had abrasions, lacerations, and a severe concussion, but he was better than anyone anticipated when they brought him in. My husband and I dropped

everything and went down to Iowa, and I can tell you, it was the community- the people that surrounded us, and the God we believe in, that wove life and peace and even laughter into the past few days.

Let God be what holds you together when life unravels. Be a people who support and weave love and encouragement into the lives of others- like you were for me this week and like you have been for countless others. A new and beautiful tapestry is being woven by divine fingers. Don't give up hope. God's design is one of peace and love and joy and mercy, and we are part of it. Hold onto the strings of healing. Hold onto God, because when everything falls apart, Jesus is there holding us together.

Amen