

Introductory

This incident is also recorded by Matthew (8:28-34) and Mark (5:1-20). Matthew's account is the shortest, and all three relate information that the other three omit. The reading of the incident from the lectern on Sunday is a new thing. None of the accounts are appointed to be read in the TLH one-year lectionary or the LW three-year readings.

Textual Notes

26. Jesus and His merry band have just crossed the Sea of Galilee to “τὴν χώραν τῶν Γερασσηνῶν, ἣτις ἐστὶν ἀντιπέρα τῆς Γαλιλαίας – the region of Gerasenes, opposite Galilee.” The exact location of this incident is discussed at length on the Internet, and even before that invention there seems to have been some uncertainty about it. WIK says,

[Byzantine](#) Christian [monks](#) venerated a site situated a few kilometres north of Hippos on the lake shore, as the location of the miracle. It is the only place fitting Matthew's description, since it contains the only "steep bank" in the area descending all the way to the shore of the lake. The site became apparently known since at least the [Early Muslim period](#) as Kursya,^[2] the [Aramaic](#) word for "chair", and later as [Kursi](#), a word with the same meaning in [Arabic](#),^[3] The monks built a walled monastic complex there and made it a destination for Christian [pilgrims](#). That monastery was destroyed by [Sassanid](#) Persian armies in 614 CE, partially rebuilt, and finally levelled by the [749 Galilee earthquake](#). The remains of the monastery can be visited in the [Kursi National Park](#). Christian artifacts from Kursi can be viewed at the [Golan Archaeological Museum](#).

My tendency is to go with where the monks thought the place to be. They would have been a lot closer in time to the event, and they have no theological or political axe to grind. Also important is the presence of the “steep bank” at that location. Having said all that, it's not a big deal, and I wouldn't spend too much time on it, and especially not in preaching.

27. Upon disembarking, “ὕπνητησεν ἀνὴρ τις ἐκ τῆς πόλεως – a certain man out from the city met Him.” The verb is not common, with only nine other appearances in the NT, and it often has connotations of confrontation. In the secular literature – and in one of those NT usages – it is used to refer to meeting on the battlefield for battle, as is the case here.

The man is described as “ἔχων δαιμόνια, καὶ χρόνῳ ἱκανῶ - having demons for a long time.” The demons are multiple, and they have been around for a while. The man is not a normal man. The man did not wear clothes, nor did he live in a house, “ἀλλ’ ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν – but among the tombs.” You know, the naked guy who lives at the cemetery.

To be possessed by one demon is enough to cause havoc in one’s life. Mary Magdalene had seven demons, which seems like a lot. The man in this incident was possessed by not one, not seven, but by a lot of demons. Mark adds the detail that He had been chained up several times, but each time he broke loose and was “driven by the demons” into the desert.

28. When the man sees Jesus, he responds to Him with an unspecified sound – probably not audible words – and an act of worship or reverence, “ἀνακράξας προσέπεσεν αὐτῷ - he cried out and fell prostrate in front of Him.” Was it an act of worship coming from the person himself, or an act of reverence or fear emanating from the demons inside of him?

Vincent calls it, “the prostration of abject terror,” and it’s a both/and. The demons are terrified because they know the identity of Jesus and are aware of His power over them. The man is terrified because he knows the same thing, but he doesn’t know what that means for him. We know the rest of the story – Jesus will cast the demons out – but he doesn’t.

Mark portrays the man as an Incredible Hulk sort of human, capable of breaking chains used to subdue him, and he would injure himself with stones. We also know that pigs will die that day, but he didn’t know that. He did know that demons controlled him, and Jesus was the enemy of demons, and for all he knew the demons would throw him into the sea.

They said, “Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, Ἰησοῦ Υἱὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ Ὑψίστου – What to me and you Jesus son of God the Most High?” It’s the same question, using the exact same wording, that Jesus asked Mary in at the Wedding in Cana (John 2:4). There, she had just implicitly (“they have no wine”) asked Him if He could help out with the wine shortage problem.

The common thread between those two incidents is that they both have somebody talking (see Matthew) about “the time” or “hour.” As you recall, Jesus responded to that request by saying that His “time” has not yet come, then He went ahead and changed the water into wine. Matthew adds the detail that the demons asked Jesus about coming “before the time.”

Both cases seem to involve people – Mary and The Demoniac – who are on some level confused about the timing of Jesus showing forth His power, first by changing the water into wine, and then here by – the demons know the score when it comes to them and Jesus, but for some reason they thought they had some more time to torment this miserable soul.

The demons are many, but they speak as one (singular) and their question is followed by the following request, “δέομαί σου, μή με βασανίσῃς – I urgently implore of you that you should not torment me.” The word “torment” can mean various sorts of suffering, from that inflicted by chronic illness to that caused by waves that just keep battering the boat.

Or the chronic torment with which they have been afflicting this poor man – many of them and for a long time – and they seem to expect Jesus to do that to them. You might make the case that if Jesus did that, then justice would be done. But that isn't the way Jesus interacts with demons, who are not on the level of humans, but are below us in creation.

29. The demon's words to Jesus did not come in a vacuum. He was saying it “παρήγγελλεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ ἐξελθεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου – because He was commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man.” That explains why The Demoniac man was proclaiming what he was saying and why he was making the request he was asking.

The next part of the verse explains the “torment” they expected as their just punishment for the torment with which they had inflicted the man for a while, “πολλοῖς γὰρ χρόνοις συνηπάκει αὐτόν – for many times it had seized him.” The word “συναρπάζω – to seize” occurs four times total in the NT, and it means to forcibly take somebody against his will.

The man was clearly an ongoing public safety issue – Matthew tells us that nobody dared get close to the man – so that he was chained and had guards posted. A thick rope is very strong. A thin chain is much stronger than a thick rope. A ½” truckers’ chain can pull one (a truck), and ¼” chain is probably strong enough for most things most of us would do.

The chain classic *The Complete Guide to Chain* says “ἄλυσις – chain” has been around since at least 225 B.C., where it “was used to draw a bucket of water up from a well. This very early bucket chain was composed of connected metal rings.” That classic work is one of a very few books not available from Amazon, but if you google the title...there it is!

Still, a chain is a chain, and most chains held most prisoners, but not this one. The chain was attached to “πέδη – shackles” that were attached to the man's body parts – arms, legs, waist – and together constituted “δεσμός – a bond” or “an impediment” that robbed him of his freedom. Breaking free was not – I don't think – supernatural, but it was superhuman.

As you know, under severe stress the body can do what you wouldn't think it could do under normal circumstances. The most common instance that comes to mind is the parent who lifts a car or other heavy object off a friend or child, something that he normally would not be able to do, or when Jean Valjean lifted heavy things off people in prison and in Paris.

It was not the man's idea; the demons made him do it, “ἤλαύνετο ἀπὸ τοῦ δαιμονίου εἰς τὰς ἐρήμους – being driven by the demons into the wilderness,” into their home territory. Mark tells us that night and day the man was going among the tombs – in a cemetery – and mountains crying out and bruising himself with stones; what wonderful fun for Satan.

The verb “ἐλαύνω – to push or drive” that describes him forced to there is found four other times in the NT, two times in reference to men with oars rowing against the wind (Mark

6:48, John 6:19), once for ships driven by the wind that is blowing with them (James 3:4), and once metaphorically for “waterless springs and mists driven by a storm” (2 Peter 2:17).

30. So that’s why they began the conversation with Jesus, who responded by asking, “Τί σοι ὄνομά ἐστιν – What is your name?” We have spoken here before about the significance of a man’s name; it said a lot more about a person then than it does now, he said “Λεγιών, ὅτι εἰσῆλθεν δαιμόνια πολλὰ εἰς αὐτόν – ‘Legion’ because many demons entered into him.”

A Roman Legion was made up of about six thousand men, and Mark tells us – later on – that there were two thousand swine. There were a lot of demons tormenting this man, and they had been at it for quite a while. The positive thing about demon possession is that once the demons have left, the long-term effects are generally minimal and often nil.

There’s a school of thought that says this entire episode has political meaning and is written in political code, much like Revelation, that school says. Except that Revelation is written in the form of apocalyptic literature – John tells us that with the first word of the book – while this is written by the synoptics as a historical narrative of what actually happened.

31. They begged Jesus that He would “μὴ ἐπιτάξῃ αὐτοῖς εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον ἀπελθεῖν – not command them to depart into the abyss,” meaning that they knew that their fate was in His hands, and that even though they outnumbered Him some high number to one, and that if He wanted to dispatch them straight to hell, there wasn’t a thing they could do about it.

But of course, that’s just where they are headed, to “τὴν ἄβυσσον – the abyss,” but not just yet. That word occurs ten times in the NT, seven in the Book of Revelation, and it means a bottomless pit, a place of the dead, not a pleasant place, and it sounds a lot like hell, the home of these demons. But it’s a matter of timing, and they’re still hanging around.

32. These days, you won’t find pigs out in the fields, like here “ἐν τῷ ὄρει – on the mountain.” I can remember when pigs would be let out into the newly harvested corn field to clean up, but the newer combines don’t leave much behind, and fences are becoming a thing of the past out in the country, and pigs are mostly raised in confinement buildings.

If you are a pastor in a rural congregation, and if you didn’t understand any part of that paragraph, then maybe you should. I have one pig farmer among my sheep and several who raise pigs, and they are a treasure-trove of information on the animals. If you want to know about cows, or how and why things grow, and planting and harvest, open your ears.

My pig farmer has a simple operation. He raises pigs to sell to 4-H kids and to feed his neighbors very tender and tasty pork, and he does most of it by hand. Pigs for restaurants and grocery stores are raised in big buildings, under conditions specified by companies like Hormel and Smithfield, and feeding, waste control, and most of the operation is automated.

In the story of the Prodigal, the pigs were being kept in a pen and they ate and did all other bodily functions within that pen. The pig farmers in this true story were herding pigs, which can be done, and the demons “παρεκάλεσαν αὐτὸν ἵνα ἐπιτρέψῃ αὐτοῖς εἰς ἐκείνους εἰσελθεῖν· καὶ ἐπέτρεπεν αὐτοῖς – urgently implored Him to let them enter into them.”

We see from this incident and from things like the serpent in the garden and other animals in the Bible that animals may be affected by Satan or demons. There seems to be a plethora of anecdotal evidence that such is still the case, and that evidence suggests that such a thing is more likely in non-Christian areas than Christian, just like it is for human possession.

These demons know that they are about to be banished from a human, God’s highest creation, and their request is for a transfer to a lower species, that herd of pigs. There is no evidence that pigs were the chosen mode on account of their being ceremonially unclean. It appears that the pigs are a destination of opportunity; they just happened to be there.

Jesus does not actively initiate the transfer, but passively “ἐπέτρεπεν αὐτοῖς – He allowed them” to go into the pigs. I suppose you could talk about the active and passive will of God. Better still, refer to places like Matthew (19:8) where the Pharisees state that Moses “commanded” divorce. Jesus corrects them; Moses actually “allowed” (this word) divorce.

We know that these demons, whatever else was going on, because of their fallen nature will always and only be enemies of and opposed to Jesus. If you believe in demonic conspiracy theories, their choice of the herd of pigs is strategic. The story ends with the townspeople asking or begging Jesus to leave that area. Why? Hint: Follow the money.

33. The demons left the man, entered the pigs, and “ὥρμησεν ἡ ἀγέλη κατὰ τοῦ κρημνοῦ εἰς τὴν λίμνην καὶ ἀπεπνίγη – the pigs rushed down the steep bank into the lake and they were drowned.” The pigs were drowned, not the demons, and if I know my demonology, such a thing would not be possible, not yet. At the end of the day, a lot of pigs were killed.

The first take-away here is that the pig slaughter pales in comparison to one man’s torment at the hand of these demons. Man is more important than pig. The second thing is that demons can torment humans – they do – but they can’t kill us. No doubt the demons took great pleasure in – they are the subject – actively running these pigs to their watery deaths.

The Christian handwringers who are bothered by the loss of so much animal life should cease wringing. The man who had been tormented by those demons in the way described – the drowned pigs were the last thing on his mind. Understanding the Order of Creation, we know two thousand dead pigs are a small price to pay for one mans relief of demons.

The critics of Christianity have cited this incident as an example of our religion’s low regard for animals, and they are partially correct. We believe man to be God’s highest

creation, and in His Image, and animals are secondary, but it's not a close secondary. We are not just the highest animal, but we are in a completely different category from them.

I intend to correct that on Sunday. I'm not going to defend or even speak to every human/animal interaction on or off the farm, but we recognize animals to be a part of God's wondrous creation, and we are stewards of it all, and it's all here for us to use and to enjoy, and to handle rightly. Because of that understanding, we don't condone cruelty to animals.

Nor do we condemn the eating of animals, which we are given permission to do after the Flood. We have family members who are vegan and vegetarian, and they have encouraged us to stop eating meat. For my part, I tell them that if they don't want to eat meat, then go for it! Animals were put here by God to serve us and to feed us, not the other way around.

34. Following the money, the hog-slaughtering demons brought out the ire of the pig herders, who turned on Jesus. For those of you who are pastors in rural congregations, you probably already know that livestock – look it up – are worth money. It's why people steal them – rustling – and its why death from disease and accident can be devastating.

If you live in the city, you can watch *All Creatures Great and Small* on PBS.

The gut reaction of the pig farmers seems to be one of fear; “ἔφυγον καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν – they fled and told people” what they had seen, both in town and in the country. The word “fled” is the one you use when somebody is fleeing danger for your own safety, and that's okay. What did they see as the source of danger? Demons looking for a new home, or Jesus?

It's okay to flee danger. In Matthew (2:13), Joseph flees Judea with the Holy Family to Egypt, and (3:7) Jesus warns Pharisees to flee from the wrath to come. The word is common in the NT, with twenty-nine appearances, including places where Jesus “flees” danger. The herders told everybody because it was rather big news and quite a big deal.

35. As is the nature of mankind, having heard about them, “ἐξῆλθον δὲ ἰδεῖν τὸ γεγονός – then they went out to see the happenings,” to see first-hand what was going down. What they found when they got there was Jesus and the man who had been possessed by many demons for a long time “ἱματισμένον καὶ σωφρονούντα – clothed and in his right mind.”

We don't usually talk about somebody being “clothed,” but that was a new thing for the man and therefore noteworthy. The verb of being “σωφρονέω” is the opposite of what he was like before while under control of the demons. It means what we would call “of sound mind” or just “normal.” We note again no permanent damage from the lengthy possession.

They saw the man sitting “παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τοῦ Ἰησοῦ – at the feet of Jesus,” the place where the student is when learning from the teacher. He was trying to figure out what had

been going on in his life for all that time and what it all means and where do I go from here? The townies, “καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν – and they were afraid,” of new, unfamiliar things.

As is the nature of mankind, they were comfortable with the old and familiar and are uncomfortable with unfamiliar new things. The norm had been to steer clear of the naked guy who lives down at the cemetery, the one who hurts himself and Jesus – who’s that? Sometimes we don’t like to get outside of our comfort zone even if it’s a good new thing.

36. Those who had been there for all the commotion and who went out to see it, “ἀπήγγειλαν δὲ αὐτοῖς οἱ ἰδόντες πῶς ἐσώθη ὁ δαιμονισθείς – then reported to them what they had seen, how he was delivered from the demon possession.” The translations almost all use “healed” and “cured,” which would give the impression that the man was sick.

The man was not sick, and modern “Bible Scholars” who make these things into mental illness – that’s a different thing from demon possession, which is what is going on here. In fact, the verb used here is “σώζω – to save” passively “to be delivered out of danger,” and it’s the word most often used for our salvation from sin, death, and Satan by Jesus.

37. Having heard that first-hand account of the goings on, “καὶ ἠρώτησεν αὐτὸν ἅπαν τὸ πλῆθος τῆς περιχώρου τῶν Γερασηνῶν ἀπελθεῖν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν – and the multitudes from the area of Gerasene and the surrounding area asked Him to leave.” The verb “to ask” is not actually the one for a petition, but the one for asking a question, expecting an answer.

They asked Him if He could please leave “ὅτι φόβῳ μεγάλῳ συνείχοντο – because they were seized with great fear,” an imperfect passive; the fear grabbed on to them and would not let go, and you get the idea that there is more going on here than just being outside of their collective comfort zone. Actually, it’s much more than just that. Follow the money.

There are two sides in the cosmos; God is good, and Satan is evil. Which side are you going to come down on? Jesus is on the side of good, and that’s not the team for which these people are playing. But He’s clearly on the more powerful side, and that makes Him dangerous. And besides that, He’s hard on the livestock, which is the crux of the matter.

If you do the math, 2,000 pigs weighing 200 pounds per unit adds up to 40,000 pounds on the hoof. The market is at \$1.08/lb. for live hogs, so that’s about \$43,200 worth of pig gone into to that watery tomb. They would rather stick with the familiar, including demons and the guy out at the cemetery, and those pigs were still alive when Jesus strode into town.

As for His part, like me, Jesus doesn’t want to be where He’s not wanted, so “αὐτὸς δὲ ἐμβὰς εἰς πλοῖον ὑπέστρεψεν – He got into the boat and returned,” and when we catch up with Him (40) He has crossed back over the Sea of Galilee, and we find Him as well in more familiar territory and among people who seem to appreciate what He has to offer.

38. The man from whom the demons had been cast “ἐδεῖτο δὲ αὐτοῦ – urgently implored Jesus to take him away from all this, and we get that. Why would you want to be in that place of horrible memories with people who think that what had been his life was normal? Why would you not want to be with The One who had delivered you from the same.

The “urgently implored” is the same verb that has made two previous appearances in this pericope. This is the blood and guts battlefield where spiritual warfare rages; like all war, it’s important, and you want to win, and not to lose. The verb here is in the middle form; the man is urgently imploring because of his own interest; he really wants out of here.

Jesus ἀπέλυσεν δὲ αὐτὸν λέγων – then sent Him away, saying...” The verb is “ἀπολύω,” and it means “to release” or “let go.” It’s often used to speak of a man divorcing his wife. It seems the man also felt obligated on some level to come with Jesus, and here Jesus is releasing him from any such obligation to leave his home, but He wants him to stay put.

39. Only to give him another obligation, one he could exercise here from his home. He uses a present imperative verb to tell the man to “ὑπόστρεφε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου – return to your house,” He says to the man who had been living in a van down in the cemetery, “καὶ διηγοῦ ὅσα σοι ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεός – and tell all that has been done for you by God.”

The man did just that; “ἀπῆλθεν καθ’ ὅλην τὴν πόλιν κηρύσσων ὅσα ἐποίησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς – he went through all the city proclaiming all that had been done for Him by Jesus.” The verb “κηρύσσω – to preach” is a common word for that, and it’s a participle; he kept it up, but he was not a Pastor. But when people who knew him heard him...powerful!

Law/Gospel

Demons In/Demons Out – Demon influence and demon possession are horrible things. Satan is the enemy, and demons are his workers. Jesus shows power over Satan in this area. On Easter Sunday He shows power over death. Christians need fear neither.

Weakness/Strength - Of ourselves we are weak and powerless to fight against Satan, who often wins. Jesus shows Himself to be the One strong enough to fight against and defeat Satan. His strength is our strength to do battle with Satan.

Sermon Titles

“Jesus Meets Legion”

“What’s That Guy’s Deal?”

“Two Thousand Demons, One Christ”

Hymns

A Mighty Fortress

O Little Flock, Fear not the Foe

Anything from the *Church Militant* section