

**Burdened by Possession**  
**Psalm 42:1-8**  
**Luke 8:26-39**

Today's gospel lesson would make a great Hollywood movie. It is loaded with drama, conspiracy, and a community turned upside down. A stranger comes to town and upsets the lives of the whole community—the town crazy is healed, the swine herders are thrown out of work, and a frenzy of fear and awe captures the lives of all the townspeople.

Yet this story is also a powerful demonstration of what it really means to have Jesus in our lives. When Jesus comes to town, things change—and not necessarily the way we want them to. People are transformed and situations are thrown into chaos when we add Jesus to the mix.

The story begins with Jesus stepping into unknown territory. Across the sea of Galilee was a region known as Gerasene. It was foreign land for Jews—filled with gentile sinners. After all, these were non-Jews who delighted in unclean foods like pork. So here we have the Son of God stepping into unclean foreign territory. And lo and behold the first person to welcome him is a naked mentally unstable man who falls down before Jesus and shouts, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me”. What a welcoming committee!

Picture the scene: Jesus in foreign unclean land, with unclean pigs grazing nearby fields, in front of tombs (remember death is unclean), and an unclean naked wild man kneeling before him. Now remember, that for a devout Jew, this would have been a horrific scene. Imagine if you will, being at a park with a Giardia infested creek, being in the presence of a man with a staff infection, a woman with the H1N1 virus, and surrounded by poison oak. Got the picture?

As far as Jewish cleanliness laws go, he could not have picked a worse place to go. And yet here he was in the midst it all. But there in front of him was a man possessed by demons—and not just one or two, but a whole legion of them. So tormented and burdened was this man that he lived his life in torment and exile. When he got too much to handle, the local townsfolk would bind him with chains and shackles and keep him under guard. But even these measures could not keep him contained. He would break free and run back out in to the wild, oblivious of the repercussions of his possessions.

And here was Jesus, whose mission was to set people free from whatever holds them back from a relationship with God. This man was possessed by demons and these demons prevented him from a relationship with God. So Jesus orders the demons out of the man and into a herd of nearby swine. The man, now in his right mind, clothes himself and begins a life of praising God.

Desiring the life of a disciple of Jesus, he begs Jesus to let him go with him. But Jesus has another life in mind. He tells the man to go back home and tell everyone what God has done for him. Be a witness and living testimony of God's care for your life. But the man goes one step further and becomes God's witness to the whole community, proclaiming all throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

This man's life completely changed when his possession went from being possessed by demons to being possessed by Jesus. The burden of possession in his life affected everything about him: his relationships, his home life and work life. It affected how he treated other people and how society treated him. His possession became a burden too great for him to bear.

So when he was changed from being possessed by demons to being possessed by Jesus, so too did his whole world. He went from hating everyone and everything to praising God and living a life of gratitude.

While none of us have been possessed by demons in the same way as this man, each one of us is possessed by something or someone. These are the things in our lives that have control over who we are and what we say and do. For some, these demon possessions come in the form of addictions. Addictions to alcohol, drugs, caffeine, certain foods, the internet, the newspaper, cleanliness, exercise, and anything else that we cannot seem to break free from.

There is also the possession of stuff. I recently heard a story about a man who had an antique grandfather clock. It was his most prized possession. The clock was the type that had to be wound on a regular basis. It needed to be wound, however, every three days. Like clockwork, this man would wind up the clock every three days without fail. At first, it just became a regular habit, but after a while it began to influence other things in his life. He had to be careful not to run late in a meeting and get home late or the clock might not be wound in time. He also found that it began to influence his family vacations. He could not take his family on vacation for more than two and a half days, because he had to be back in time to wind the clock. It wasn't until after a considerable amount of inconvenience that this man began to realize just how much this clock was controlling his life. He was possessed by this clock!

Being possessed by something can come in any form. I recently bought a pool for the boys to use this summer. I spent last weekend shoveling and relocating somewhere between 30-40 wheel barrel loads of dirt to level up the ground for the pool. Next came the sand which consumed a whole evening. Then came the pool set up—laying out the tarp, hooking up the pump, assembling the latter, filling up the pool with water. Before I knew it, every free moment I had at home was spent putting up that pool. It possessed my life!

We can be possessed by health and hygiene, obsessed with checking every label. Or we can be possessed by things we have to care for: animals, homes, gardens, hobbies, and other things that consume our time. While none of these things are necessarily bad in and of themselves, we have to be careful not to let these things control our lives. When the man's life was changed from demon possession to Jesus possession, everything he did followed suit. When we let things control us, we find our whole world revolving around those things. But if we refocus our lives on Jesus and become Jesus possessed, we will find that the things that really matter are not the things that formerly possessed us.

The dishes can wait an extra few hours so I can spend time with my family. The lawn mowing can wait a few more days so I can spend time in study and prayer. The quilt project can wait until after I visit an ill friend. The weeds can wait another day so I can worship. The pool can be filled up tomorrow so our family can go on a picnic today. And yes, if the clock stops because I forgot to wind it after three days, then so be it. May you find yourselves less possessed by the things that control you and more possessed by Jesus who loves you and wants what's best for you! Amen.

## **Prayer:**

Holy Lord,  
Help us to be less controlled by the things around us, and more focused on Jesus and your will for our lives. Grant that we may understand that what really matters is not the little things that we are stuck to, but the bigger picture of your love for us in Jesus Christ. In His name we pray.  
Amen.