

**The second Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: June 19, 2022**

**Luke 8:26-39: *You Don't Have to be at war with yourself***

***It doesn't have to be that way***

**Preached**

**By**

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**In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. AMEN!**

**The noted author, John Killinger, tells a powerful story about a man who is all-alone in a hotel room in Canada. The man is in a state of deep depression. He is so depressed that he can't even bring himself to go downstairs to the restaurant to eat. He is a powerful man usually the chairman of a large shipping company but at this moment, he is absolutely overwhelmed by the pressures and demands of life... and he lies there on a lonely hotel bed far from home wallowing in self-pity.**

**All his life, he has been fastidious, worrying about everything, anxious and fretful, always fussing and stewing over every detail. And now, at mid-life, his anxiety has gotten the best of him, even to the extent that it is difficult for him**

**to sleep and to eat. He worries and broods and agonizes about everything, his business, his investments, his decisions, his family, his health, even, his dogs. Then, on this day in this Canadian hotel, he craters. He hits bottom. Filled with anxiety, completely immobilized, paralyzed by his emotional despair, unable to leave his room, lying on his bed, he moans out loud: “Life isn’t worth living this way, I wish I were dead!”**

**And then, he wonders, what God would think if he heard him talking this way. Speaking aloud again he says, “God, it’s a joke, isn’t it? Life is nothing but a joke.” Suddenly, it occurs to the man that this is the first time he’s talked to God since he was a little boy. He is silent for a moment and then he begins to pray. He describes it like this: “I just talked out loud about what a mess my life was in and how tired I was and how much I wanted things to be different in my life. And you know what happened next? A voice!! I heard a voice say, ‘It doesn’t have to be that way!’ That’s all.”**

**He went home and talked to his wife about what happened. He talked to his brother who is a minister and asked him: “Do you think it was God speaking to me?” The brother said: “Of course, because that is the message of God to you and every one of us. That’s the message of the Bible. That’s why Jesus Christ came into the world to save us, to deliver us, to free us, to change us**

**and to show us that ‘It doesn’t have to be that way.’ A few days later, the man called his brother and said, “You were right. It has really happened. I’ve done it. I’ve had a rebirth. I’m a new man. Christ has turned it around for me.”**

**Well, the man is still prone to anxiety. He still has to work hard. But, now he has a source of strength. During the week, he often leaves his work-desk and goes to the church near his office. He sits there and prays. He says: “It clears my head. It reminds me of who I am and whose I am. Each time as I sit there in the Sanctuary, I think back to that day in that hotel room in Canada and how depressed and lonely and lost I felt, and I hear that voice saying: It doesn’t have to be that way.”**

**That is precisely what this story in Luke 8 is all about. Christ walks into the tormented life of the Gerasene demoniac, this madman, whose life is coming apart at the seams and He turns it around for him. He gives him a new beginning, a new start, a new birth. At the beginning of the narrative, it sounds like a horror-story. This wild-eyed, adrenalin-filled, madman comes running and shrieking out of the tomb. He is so unbalanced! He is convinced that he is being held captive by a whole legion of demons, who are pulling and jerking him in every direction.**

**This is an eerie, grim, suspenseful, frightening situation. Jesus and His disciples have just come through a storm on the Sea of Galilee. It is nighttime and having survived that frightening storm they are thrilled to now set foot on solid ground. But, as they get out of the boat, they encounter a different kind of storm... yet another scary experience. They hear strange sounds coming from the tombs... shrieks, growls, screams, moans, the rattling of chains. Then, suddenly, a horrifying sight. A madman with tattered clothes, bruised, dirty, bloody and battered with pieces of chains dangling from his arms and ankles, comes running and screaming directly toward them!**

**Now, let me ask you something: “What would you have done in that situation?” This was a perilous place, a bloodcurdling moment... a powerful, dangerous, berserk man, charging them. I think I would have run for my life... or jumped back in the boat. But, not Jesus! Jesus stood His ground and faced the madman. Undaunted, unafraid... Jesus stood there and dealt with this wild man. Jesus healed him. He brought peace to his troubled soul. He changed him. He cleansed him. He turned his life around... and you know (don't you?) that He can do that for you. Now, let me underscore this and spell it out a bit more by lifting three ideas out of this great story in Luke 8.**

**First, you don't have to be at war with yourself. It doesn't have to be that way. Notice here in Luke 8 that the Gerasene demoniac, this madman, was at war with himself. He was hurting himself, bruising himself, injuring himself. How often we do that! As Pogo put it: "We have met the enemy and he is us!!" One day a young father was shopping in a crowded super-market. His three-year old son was with him. The little boy was riding in the grocery cart... and he was misbehaving terribly and causing all kinds of problems.**

**Every time the father would put something into the cart, the little boy would grab it and throw it back out. If the cart went close to the shelves, the three-year old boy would just rake stuff off onto the floor. At one point, the little boy crawled out of the cart and ran down the aisle (knocking over every display he could get his hands on) with his father in hot pursuit. People who were in the store at the time could hear the father saying out loud over and over, "Just be patient, Tommy. It won't be much longer Tommy. It'll be O.K., Tommy. Be calm, Tommy. Hang in there, Tommy."**

**Finally, a distinguished looking woman came up to the man and she said: "I just want to compliment you. I've been watching you and I want you to know that I admire you and the remarkable patience you have with little Tommy."**

**“O, but Lady,” the man said. “You don’t understand.” His name is Michael. I’m Tommy!!!” Well, that’s a smart man! He was right to start with himself. If we are going to set a problem right, we must get ourselves set right first.**

**Some time ago, a lawyer friend of mine stopped into my office wanting to come and see him. He was down in the dumps, at his wit’s end. He said:**

**“Everything’s gone wrong. I have lost confidence in my professional ability... my wife has left me. I can’t get along with my children. I’m cut off from my parents and my in-laws. I’m having conflicts with my co-workers. I’ve been drinking heavily. Everybody has left me... and I don’t blame them. I’ve been bitter and hostile. I’ve done so many mean and cruel things... and now I have so many problems (and then he literally said this)... “My troubles are Legion!”**

**He paused and took a deep breath. Then, he leaned forward and said: “To tell you the truth, I think all those problems and troubles are symptoms. My real problem is that I don’t like myself... and that taints everything I touch and do.” Well, he was probably right. When you are at war with yourself, it smudges and distorts every relationship. On the other hand, when we feel good about ourselves, we are more loving, more patient, more thoughtful, more gracious... toward everyone we see.**

**Do you want to feel good about yourself? Do you want to like yourself more?**

**Do you want to stop bruising and hurting yourself? Do you want to be at peace within? Then remember this: “You are special to God. He loves you! You are extremely valuable to Him! He claims you as His child!”**

**If you ever doubt that or wonder about that, recall the story about the old man who was brought to a hospital emergency room late one evening, an apparent mugging victim. He looked like one of the homeless. He was ill-clothed and dirty and disheveled, battered... and appeared to be unconscious.**

**One of the young medical students took one look at him and said: “What in the world should we do with this worthless wretch?” The old man opened his eyes slightly and in an amazingly strong voice said, “Call him not worthless for whom Christ died!” You don’t have to be at war with yourself.... It doesn’t have to be that way. You are special to God and that makes you supremely valuable.**

**Second, you don't have to be at war with other people. It doesn't have to be that way. In Luke 8, Legion, the madman, was very much at war with other people. He had been cast out of society... chained, shackled, exiled to the tombs, constantly doing battle with other people... here in this story he runs**

**out toward Jesus and His disciples looking for a fight. Isn't it amazing how crossways and estranged and hostile people can get?**

**Once on 20/20 they did a program called "Neighbors at War"... showing how next-door neighbors do battle with one another, fighting one another, fussing at one another, suing one another, sometimes even shooting at one another because of a barking dog, or a noisy power tool or a bouncing basketball.**

**When will we ever learn? When will we ever learn to befriend one another, to respect one another, to love one another? A city newspaper had an article about a young man from a wealthy family who was about to graduate from high school. It was the custom in that affluent neighborhood for the parents to give the graduate an automobile.**

**"Bill" and his father had spent months looking at cars... and the week before graduation they found the perfect car. Bill was certain that on graduation night that car would be his. After the graduation ceremonies, Bill's father handed him a gift-wrapped Bible! Bill was so furious that he threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house. He and his father never spoke again, never saw each other again. His parents tried to reach him, but Bill refused to speak to them or see them... or read their letters.**



**When his parents died, Bill came home. As he sat one night going through his father's possessions that he was to inherit, he came across the Bible his father had given him for graduation. Bill brushed away the dust and opened it to find a cashier's check...dated the day of his graduation – in the exact amount of the car they had chosen together! (Dear Abby, Sept. 3, 1990)**

**Isn't that sad? Isn't that pitiful? Isn't that tragic? I hope Bill read that Bible cover to cover... because it has many lessons he needed to learn that all of us need to learn, one of them being: You don't have to be at war with other people. It doesn't have to be that way!**

**Third and Finally, You Don't Have to Be at War with God. It doesn't have to be that way. In Luke 8, Legion, the madman, is also cut off from God. "What have you to do with me?... don't torment me," he says to Jesus.**

**Carl Michalson, a brilliant young theologian who died in a plane crash some years ago, once told about playing with his young son one afternoon. They were tussling playfully on their front lawn when Dr. Michalson accidentally hit the young boy in the face with his elbow. It was a sharp blow full to his son's face. The little boy was stunned by the impact of the elbow. It hurt... and he was just about to burst into tears. But then, he looked into his father's eyes and instead of anger or hostility, he saw there his father's sympathy and**

**concern; he saw there his father's love and compassion. Then, instead of exploding into tears, the little boy suddenly burst into laughter. What he saw in his father's eyes... made all the difference!**

**This is one of the reasons Jesus is so important to us. He lets us look into the Father's eyes! When we look at Jesus we see what God is like and what God wants us to be like!**

**Jesus shows us the love, the compassion, the concern and the empathy in the Father's eyes... and that's the good news of our faith. Jesus reveals that God looks at us not with angry, vengeful, condemning eyes, but with the eyes of love.**

**So, we don't have to be at war with ourselves, we don't have to be at war with other people, we don't have to be at war with God. Jesus comes into our lives, just as He came into Legion's life, saying: "It doesn't have to be that way!"**