

Sermon Notes June 23, 2019

Focus Luke 8 - the Gerasene demoniac and sovereignty

Lectionary Readings http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CProp7_RCL.html

If you follow the lectionary, we now have two sets of readings or tracks. St Timothy's will be following "Track 2" You may not care why, but if you do, look for the asterisks on the back page (*) for more explanation.



The Land of the "Gadarenes" or "Gerasenes" Jesus's encounter with a tormented man has a huge backstory. Where are we? There are a bunch of small cities in "The Decapolis." The red city names in this map are the 10 cities of the Decapolis. This country of the Gerasenes is squarely in the middle of the Deca (10) polis (cities).

The Decapolis had a majority Gentile population and dominant Roman culture. This is obvious on its face. What Jewish city would have pig farming as a major industry?

Luke 8 says -- *Jesus and his disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.* The story takes place somewhere south and east of Galilee and we're not going to get a gps location, but Jesus is not in friendly territory.

<https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/gerasa-gerasenes>

Triple Threat - this story shows up in Matthew, Mark and Luke

Edge of the Edge of Edge - Gentiles, dirty. Pig farmers, dirty. But even these 'dirty outsiders' could not handle one of their own - a man named Legion. Jesus shows no hesitation to heal a person on the edge of the edge.

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What was right before the encounter with Legion? Right before the Gerasene story, Jesus had been asleep in a boat. He was asleep until some completely panicked disciple, wide-eyed and fearing for his life woke him. Jesus "rebuked" the storm and everything was still and calm. He steps off this boat still soaked from the storm to meet a deranged and hostile man in the country of the Gerasenes.

Jesus reacts incredibly graciously (In my opinion) when a naked guy who was living in a graveyard rushes him. This story covers a range of offenses that a self respecting Hebrew would have taken (Gentile, pigs, and graveyards). But this story is much more than just about Jesus rolling with the punches. The stories are about sovereignty.

Before during and after the story, it's about sovereignty Jesus is Lord over wind and waves, Gentiles and Jews, pig ranchers and wheat farmers, those in their right mind and those who are possessed. He has the control to send a bunch of demonically possessed pigs to their drowning. More importantly he can heal even those who were completely written off as hopeless. And more broadly, he is sovereign even in the Decapolis where Gentiles abound. (I'm not sure, but I think this is the only healing of a Gentile in Luke.)

History of the Region Luke wrote the Gospel about 10 years after something terrible had happened in the area (terrible violence broke out about 30-40 years after Jesus' death.). Vespasian killed about a thousand men in the country of the Gerasenes during and after a Jewish revolt. Many who died would have been in the graveyard referred to in the text. During the revolt (again - post Jesus), Jewish warriors had gone to the

region to kill Gentiles and take back their homeland. Vespasian returned the favor by killing these Jewish warriors in the same location.



Luke's telling of the story would have seemed fresh and raw on the minds of those who knew the war as contemporary history. He and the other Gospel writers found fresh relevance in this story of Jesus. Even the pigs take a darker tone than you might imagine.

Pigs- The 10th Fretensis Legion was a major player in destroying Jerusalem in 70 AD. as well as generally a symbol of oppression.

(Vespasian's war time line <http://www.josephus.org/FlJosephus2/warChronology5Pg3.htm>.) Demons sent into pigs would have been a fitting tribute to the 10th Fretensis Legion, as the Gospel writers used this story in light of the destruction of Jerusalem. I imagine it's a subtle way of resisting the Pax Romana.

Demonic possession I don't reject demonic possession outright. However, I have never met someone that I would consider possessed. I have met a lot of people that I would prefer not to be in a dark alley with. You might insist that my demonic agnosticism is not enough and reject demons as a relic of superstitious past. Either way, what value does this story have for us? I believe that when Jesus sees people, he sees them as they were intended - loved, connected and whole. When he encounters people who are not all these things, he then takes decisive steps to heal and connect them.

Did you notice? Legion and the town folk wanted solitude-- not healing The naked screaming man that Jesus encountered did not want to be whole. He wanted to be left alone and wanted to scare Jesus back into the boat. When Jesus casts out this darkness, only the man is healed - the whole town is not. The town wanted to be left alone. They preferred this unconnected co-existence to actually loving this man. I can't blame them really - losing all their pigs was bad for business and they would prefer that Jesus leave them alone, instead of messing up something else if he stayed. But if you want to be whole, don't expect to be alone, and don't expect your life to remain in perfect order.

Sidebar -This is a truth I know- if you make family everything - loneliness and isolation is sure to follow. Kids grow up, uncles say stupid things, and parents become feeble, but we are built for a bigger family - a wider community. Don't settle for the demons of isolation or the narrowness of your tribe and family. We need a big family to be whole.

Todd

* from the beginning of the sermon notes —The first track of Old Testament readings ("Track 1") follows major stories and themes, read mostly continuously from week to week. In Year A we begin with Genesis, in Year B we hear some of the great monarchy narratives, and in Year C we read from the later prophets (2019 is C). St. Timothy's is **not** following Track 1 in 2019. A second track of readings ("Track 2") thematically pairs the Old Testament reading with the Gospel reading, often typologically—a sort of foretelling of Jesus Christ's life and ministry, if you will. This second track is almost identical to our previous Book of Common Prayer lectionary. *We are following this Track 2 in 2019 and won't be bouncing back and forth between Tracks. In my opinion - summer attendance gets spotty and there will only be a few worshippers who really get to experience the narrative arch that is hoped for in Track 1, so I, Todd, generally tend toward Track 2 - so that you can make intertextual connections.*