

On Casting Out Demons

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Luke 8

[27] And as he stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons; for a long time he had worn no clothes, and he lived not in a house but among the tombs.

Grace to you and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Caster Out of Demons!

My father died in July of 2001 at the age of 81. The last time I visited his grave, sand had blown onto the grave plate. I used bottled water to wash the sand away. My tears mingled with the bottled water. My family and I were out among the tombs, fully clothed and pretending to be sane. Yet knowing we really do have demons. And that somehow this Son of the Most High God, the one called Jesus, is the way to be rid of demons.

Demons? It was mental illness in Jesus' day. Since then "demon" has become a general catchall term for those things that seriously bother, hurt, afflict or control us. Oh, we still believe evil exists in the world and that some people are evil or demonic. But today we don't usually refer to someone who is schizophrenic as demon possessed. Lutherans and the more educated Christians know about schizophrenia and bipolar and personality disorders and grand mal seizures, etc.

Yet, even though we are more discriminating than the fundamentalists as to how we use the term "demon" and "demonic", we agree, don't we, that certain things can be demons for us. Drug addiction. Alcohol addiction. Nicotine addiction. Sex addiction. Pornography addiction. Overeating. Negativism. The list is endless.

And beyond these modern-day demons, there are the old demons of physical suffering, the loss of memory, the loss of faith, the temptation to despair, etc.

Not a single one of us is without his or her personal demon. And it's usually plural – demons!

The fellow Jesus cured in today's Gospel had so many demons he was named Legion. A Roman Legion had 6,000 men. This man was as crazy as they come and wild and strong.

Often people like this have deep religious insights. This fellow did. He knew where to meet Jesus' boat. How sane are you? Am I? Whose boat are we headed to meet with all our demons?

One scholar has suggested that the reason this fellow was living out among the tombs was that he had once gone there to bury a loved one and had been unable to say goodbye and so had stayed, allowing his great, unresolved grief to drive him insane. Unresolved grief can do that.

I think it is not an accident that this crazy demon-possessed man living among the tombs seeks out the Son of the Most High God who has all power over life and death. It must have something to do with Jesus' Father. Son and Father are relational terms. How did the Gospel writer John put it in the most famous of all New Testament passages? "For God so loved the world that He gave his Only Begotten Son ..."

When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?"

The Son of the Most High [Father] God.

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art.

When the Vietnam war broke out, the son went. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door.

A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands. He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you, and your love for art." The young man held out this package. "I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this."

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. "Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift."

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

The man died a few months later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection.

On the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. "We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?"

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There was silence.

Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one."

But the auctioneer persisted. "Will somebody bid for this painting. Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?"

Another voice angrily. "We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Gogh's, the Rembrandt's. Get on with the real bids!"

But still the auctioneer continued. "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?"

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give \$10 for the painting."

Being a poor man, it was all he could afford.

"We have \$10, who will bid \$20?" There were no further bids. "Sold for ten dollars."

"Now let's get on with the real paintings!"

"I'm sorry to inform you that the auction is over. You see, the deceased stipulated in his will, only to be revealed now, that whoever gets "The Son" gets everything.

The Most High God gave His Son 2,000 years ago to die on the cross. Much like the auctioneer, His message today is: "The Son, the Son, who'll take the Son?"

Because, you see, whoever takes the Son gets everything.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

The Son of The Most High Father God!

Take him! But, be aware:

When we "take" him, we, like the man freed from the demons, are confronted by two competing realities:

We may want "to cuddle up" to Jesus. "The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him ..." He wanted to possess – to privatize his spirituality. Just me and Jesus. Just a closer walk with thee? Go to church, read my Bible, say my prayers – that should do it! "I'll be satisfied as long as I walk, let me walk close to Thee."

The 2nd competing reality that comes with “taking the son” is that Jesus immediately gives us a commission. “... but Jesus sent him away, saying, ‘Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.’” When you and I “take the son,” when Jesus changes our lives and frees us from our demons, he requires that we go and tell others back home – which means among those with whom we are familiar or who live close by. Letting them know you have been changed, freed. That you are a new person. Because of your encounter with the Son of The Most High God.

Now as we do that there has to be a reordering of priorities that comes as a result of our being changed/freed.

For you can do all the telling in the world, but if your life’s priorities and how you are living your life contradict what you are saying Jesus has done for you, people won’t believe you.

Just try to remember from today: Jesus casts out our demons. And we are to tell others about it!

Who wants to start first?

Amen.

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