

## **Bible Study: Mass Incarceration and the Gerasene Demoniac**

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Read Luke 8:22-39

22 One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, <sup>23</sup>and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. <sup>24</sup>They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. <sup>25</sup>He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'

<sup>26</sup> Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes,\* which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup>As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn\* no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. <sup>28</sup>When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me' — <sup>29</sup>for Jesus\* had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) <sup>30</sup>Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. <sup>31</sup>They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

<sup>32</sup> Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons\* begged Jesus\* to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. <sup>33</sup>Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

<sup>34</sup> When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. <sup>35</sup>Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. <sup>36</sup>Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. <sup>37</sup>Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes\* asked Jesus\* to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. <sup>38</sup>The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus\* sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup>'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Art: Over the course of this seminar we will be exploring these stories, reflecting on what they might have to teach us about the times we are living in. Are they speaking to us about our culture, about mass incarceration, about our own lives and anxieties? As part of our engagement with these stories, we will also be using art to think in different ways about them. Art has a way of helping us see new things in stories we may have known for a long time. It can help us slow down and pay attention to what we may have overlooked before.

In that light, we will be making a triptych from these stories, which we will also be exploring in 3 parts. A triptych is a piece of art that is made up of 3 panels which are meant to be displayed together.

Triptychs have been used in church art for centuries. I want to use a triptych because we often read the Bible as if it is a series of stories, separate from one another rather than read them together to consider how they might relate to each other. I hope that using the art form of a triptych will help us see new things in these stories we are going to read.

For instance, in this scripture, we usually read the story of Jesus calming the storm as a stand-alone story, and the Gerasene demoniac as a stand-alone story. But we can make interesting connections when we read them together. For example, in these stories fear is one constant. In the first section, the disciples become fearful when the storm comes up and they feel in danger. Then the man with the demons fears what Jesus will do to him and finally the residents of the city fear Jesus for having healed this man. In the storm, the demon-possessed man, and the city's residents, is Jesus trying to teach us something about fear?

Before we get to far, let's return to the first section of this Scripture to consider how it is speaking to us today.

Luke 8:22-25

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- What storms are raging? For the disciples in 1<sup>st</sup> century?

Free write

- What storms are raging in your community, - for those experiencing incarceration?
- Who is in your boat?
- When the storms are raging, where is your faith?

Art: Now begin your triptych. What themes/words/images from this scripture and discussion do you want to capture?

Part 2.

26 Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes,\* which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup>As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn\* no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. <sup>28</sup>When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me' — <sup>29</sup>for Jesus\* had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) <sup>30</sup>Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said,

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What is the context of this story? What was happening in this region during the first century?

The area is under Roman military occupation

Legion – Roman Military term for 6000 soldiers

Herd – “agele” was a term used to refer to a band of military recruits

Gave them permission – “epetrepseri” is a military command

What was life like under Roman oppression? Scripture tells us.

Is this a story of a man naming his oppression (legion)? Is it a story that helps us explore the psychological impact of oppression? – some people

Free write

- What would it mean to return to the abyss?
- What are the legion in communities of color?
- What are the chains and shackles for people who need treatment in our communities?
- What can we do to re-humanize those who have had their humanity stolen? (#sayhername) (people often lose their name/identity when incarcerated – felon, criminal, ex-con...)

Art: What themes/words/images do you want to capture for the second part of the triptych?

Part 3.

34 When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. <sup>35</sup>Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. <sup>36</sup>Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. <sup>37</sup>Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes\* asked Jesus\* to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. <sup>38</sup>The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus\* sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup>'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

- Does the man want to return to his village? Why?
- Does the village want him to return? Why?
- What is the cause of the “great fear” from those in the community?

### Free Write

- What are the challenges for the incarcerated to return to their communities?
- What fears do we have in speaking out on the criminalization of communities of color?
- How is Jesus calling us to respond to this fear? (is this a story about Jesus recognizing that when one person is excluded, marginalized, othered... community starts to break down. Is this a story of Jesus healing not just one man, but a community?)

Art: What themes/words/images do you want to capture for the third part of the triptych?

- Do new insights arise about the stories and discussion from the completed triptych?