

*Lord, open our ears to hear your Word spoken to us;  
Open our hearts to be changed by Your Spirit. Amen.*

When I was in my twenties, there was a self-help book everyone was reading, "The Road Less Traveled," by a psychiatrist named M.Scott Peck; it spent years at the top of the New York Times non-fiction best-seller list. Its main point was to navigate life by addressing pain rather than avoiding it. Peck's next book was called "People of the Lie," and everyone assumed it too was a self-help book. It was not. It was about people who are given over to evil. As a psychiatrist, Peck had come to believe that, in addition to all the diagnoses and categories of mental illness, there was also a category of evil. He described people so wholly given over to self, who showed no other markers of mental illness beyond thorough narcissism, so completely destructive to the people around them, and often to themselves, that evil was the only source he could name. He argues the case persuasively.

The people he describes all had a choice, but kept choosing the darkness until that was all they could choose; they no longer had their own will to choose the good, the wholesome, the life-giving. I have met a few people like that, and know of others, who consistently choose to hurt rather than help, destroy rather than build. Other people are beset by evil because they were raised in evil environments, or victims of trauma, which can make you vulnerable.

Whichever was the case with the man who greeted Jesus as he disembarked on the other side of the Sea of Galilee that day, he had almost no "self" left. He was besieged by demons so numerous that when Jesus asked their name, they called themselves "Legion."

Jesus addresses the man, but it is the demons who answer. They run him.

And it is the demons Jesus deals with – swiftly and powerfully.

He does not confuse the man with his symptoms or his disease.

He sees the man's true self, and aligns his power and strength with that.

He goes about setting him free, commanding the demons out of him.

The transformation is so complete, so powerful, that Luke tells us the people of the region were terrified. Wasn't a good day for the pigs either.

But Luke makes clear that their fear is a response to the power they see in Jesus.

That day the man is set free from a life of torture and degradation –  
his voices are gone, and he can begin to hear his own voice again.  
And the One voice of the Spirit of God.

Imagine what it was like in that man's mind to have that constant clamor gone.  
When there is stillness, you can begin to recover your sense of self,  
the true God-given self that resides at the core of each one of us,  
that self which God made and loves back into wholeness.

Most of us will never meet a person possessed by demons, thankfully.  
But we don't have to be schizophrenic or possessed by demons to need healing  
and restoration. All of us come into adulthood with our selves slightly shmushed.  
I find when I am deeply criticized or overlooked, I can feel "un-selfed,"  
and I have to recover my sense of who I am, of my belovedness in Christ.  
To do that, I have to choose to let the Spirit of God run me. How do we do that?

We hold onto our awareness of who we are as children of God.  
We use the spiritual activities – like those Way of Love Practices:  
Turn daily to Jesus and accept him as your Lord; Learn about him;  
Pray regularly, inviting his Spirit to speak inside you; Worship God, not things;  
Bless actively and regularly; Go to people who need you; Rest and recharge.  
These, and other practices you may use, bring us back into the presence of the  
One who made us and loves us and makes us whole again.  
These are all ways we allow ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit.  
And how ever much room the Holy Spirit is taking up in us,  
there's less room for the negative, the hurtful, the harmful, the wrong.

In a sense, we are already possessed by spirits other than our own –  
the people who raised us, whose voices and reactions get hardwired in us;  
the people we live with, or work with, or worship.  
We can be possessed by ambition or anxiety, anger or resentment.  
We can choose to give power to the other voices that crowd our minds and lives.  
Or we can choose to let the Holy Spirit have free rein in us.  
For we are also possessed by the Holy Spirit, who comes to us at baptism as Christ  
takes up residence in us. *"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have  
clothed yourselves with Christ."* Today, Caleb becomes possessed by God's Spirit.  
Next Sunday, Carson and Levi Bowie will be possessed by God's Spirit.

So, how do we know whose spirit we are operating out of?

We always know the Spirit of God by the fruits – if our choices are good and life-giving, if we feel blessed and are blessing others, we’re letting God run us. And with God, there is only one voice.

In the maelstrom of input and sensory data in which we live;  
in the multiplicity of messages we have internalized and  
play back to ourselves, often messages of judgment and anxiety –  
in the midst of all this talk, God’s voice is a still point, a clarity, a simplicity.  
So if there’s a lot of noise in here, or too many options, that’s not God.

It is our privilege to invite God to take up more space in us.  
To make time and space for God’s Spirit to dwell, to abide, to heal and transform.  
That man wasn’t left empty that day.

When the demons were gone, he was filled with God’s Spirit.  
The more space we make for God in us, the more we are healed.

And as we are healed people operating on Spirit power,  
We become willing agents of healing for others, for the world.  
Out of our healed wounds, God can bring healing to others.  
That man, once he was set free, wanted to follow Jesus, to come with him.  
And Jesus – Jesus who so often said, “Follow me,” now says  
“No. Stay here. Go home to your friends. Tell your community how much  
the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.”  
And that’s what he did, all over the Ten Cities. *“...and everyone was amazed.”*

This man obeyed Jesus and became one of the first witnesses to the Gentiles.  
That makes him an apostle, by my book.  
This homeless, crazed, bleeding, frightening lunatic becomes an apostle.  
What does suggest to us, sitting here, “clothed and in our right minds?”  
If he’s an apostle...

imagine what we can be as we choose to give God more space in us.  
Imagine the transformation to lives around us  
when we start telling people what God has done for us, how blessed we are!  
Imagine the transformation to our communities  
when people see God doing amazing things in and through this church,  
when they see equality break out because we’re centered on Christ –  
no longer Greek or Jew, male or female, slave or free.  
Imagine! And then step out in faith, across to the other side.  
*Amen.*

## **Luke 8:26-39**

Jesus and his disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 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. 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" – 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.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

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. 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.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 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. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. 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. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "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.

## **Galatians 3:23-29**

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.