

I wonder if the kids had a name for him – the man who lived among the tombs and wore no clothes. Did they yell insults to mock him? Dare one another to risk being near him? Did they throw stones at him? Or was this man who could break chains so scary that thoughts of him had them crying out in fear during the night?

Demons possessed him – owned him – of that they were certain. Surely the children were warned to have nothing to do with him.

Then one day strangers came by boat – Jesus and his disciples. Right there on the shore the naked man met Jesus – the demons caused him to shout out: “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.” This stranger was no stranger to the demons – of him they were afraid.

Jesus did not know the name of the demon so he asked and was told the name was Legion. 6000 Roman soldiers – that is what the word legion meant then. Surely the first readers of the gospels saw another meaning behind the simple story. It was as if we told a story about a demon were named Al Quaida today – we might suspect the story is not so much about demons as about terrorists. Scholars say that the Roman Legion that was stationed in that part of the Empire had the picture of a boar on their standard – a wild pig. Jesus sent the demons into the herd of pigs and they rushed off a cliff and were drowned in the sea.

It is not hard to see how the occupying army might have seemed demonic to the local population. I remember my 8th grade teacher, Mrs. White teaching us about godless communism – she wanted her students to know that this was not simply another form of economic structure but the very embodiment of evil. But that is another story.

However we understand the symbolism the pigs are drowned in the sea- those who tended them rushed into the village and told the people what had happened and they all came out to see. They found the man who had been owned by the demons sitting at the feet of Jesus, dressed and in his right mind.

The people were afraid – seeing this man dressed and in his right mind made the people afraid. A surprise. They should have rejoiced – had a celebration – made Jesus king but instead they asked Jesus to leave because this

man sitting clothed and in his right mind made them afraid. They knew how to deal with this man when he was naked and in the tombs but now that he was like them they were afraid.

I remember a family whose young child was very energetic – hyper-active – ADD was the diagnosis. The father bought a book about diet – changed the family’s eating patterns – the child was more settled – no medication was needed. Excited, the father gave me the book. I read parts of it – what I read I did not want to hear. I did not change my diet – I did not ask you to change yours – the family drifted away.

We get used to things the way they are. We learn to tiptoe around the person who explodes in anger, to tolerate the one who is always inviting us to nibble on a tidbit of gossip, we learn to make excuses for the lazy ones and to take for granted the ones who go the second mile because the lazy ones did not go the first.

Even with ourselves we get used to things the way they are.

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” I heard one of you repeat this word of Jesus the other day and realized how little I had kept this word of Jesus in my mind. When I ignore Jesus’ word it is not as if I am possessed by evil - yet hurt and harm often result. I get into patterns and habits – I resist changing even when I sense that changing would be for my good and the good of others.

Rather than rejoicing in one that had been lost being found, they sent Jesus away.

The man who was now dressed and in his right mind wanted to follow Jesus. But Jesus sent him home to tell how much God had done for him. Instead he told how much Jesus had done for him.

Because Jesus is God, the only begotten Son of God, it really did not matter. What God is doing, what Jesus did – it is all the same. But as I read this ending to our story I think of the times that God has been at work in some of the people of my life – I may say thanks to them but do I thank God? That is what Jesus wanted that man to do.

So what have I learned from this story? You and I can grow comfortable with evil – even at times choosing evil over good simply because it is what we grew up with it and have gotten used to.

I have learned that when someone really changes that I may not be ready to give her a second chance.

I have learned that Jesus is more powerful than any enemy that can isolate us and control us.

I hope you have learned the same.