

Luke 8:26-39

## Choose fear or Choose faith

Do you choose fear or faith?

In the movie, *Dark Knight*, the character of the Joker, actor Heath Ledger's final role, brought terror and is the image that nightmares are made of – probably the same terror that the man who called himself “Legion” brought to his Gentile community (non-Jewish).

After being confronted by this man in the country of the Gerasenes, Jesus asks the man what his name is and he responds with “Legion,” a name that actually means a Roman Legion of 6,000 soldiers.

A man, so tormented that it would only take a visible demonstration of the demons leaving him, going into a herd of swine, rushing into a lake to drown – for him to know that the demons were truly gone from him.

What happens following this demonstration of Jesus' power, this demonstration of a man being healed and freed? We do not find the people praising God that he's healed, but counting the cost of losing the herd of swine and wondering how this changed man can now be a part of their community! The swineherds run off to the city and the country and tell what has happened.

When the people arrive and see the changed man, they ask Jesus to leave! They ask him to leave b/c they are afraid – not just of their economic loss – this story is not really about the pigs – but afraid of the power of Jesus and the change that Jesus can bring to a community!

The community had learned to live with and control this demoniac (that actually took the attention off of their own lives). The power of God, even for good, comes to the community and disturbs them and their way of life! So the only way they seem to know how to respond is to respond in fear in order to protect the way of life as they know it.

Prof. Rolf Jacobson taught on very subject last weekend at the Book of Faith event at Outlaw Ranch and at the Bible study during Synod Assembly. We have many

examples in the Old Testament of people becoming fearful when they discover they are in the presence of God! And what do they do? Many times, they end up doing something stupid! Example, Jacob in Genesis 28 – he builds the house of God at Bethel when he meets God's presence – easier to imagine God in one place than to realize that God's power can meet us out in the world in our suffering!

Fear is how we respond to God's presence and to the power of Jesus to change our lives! Fear is how we respond when we feel the nudging of the Holy Spirit leading us in a direction that we do not want to go!

Understandably, this man who is healed wants to go with Jesus! But Jesus maybe asks him to do the harder thing – to go back to his home, his community – and be a witness as to what has happened. Not only the man formerly known as Legion, but also his community, must move beyond the fear of the way he was and then work through the fear of the power of Jesus who changed him and now can change them as well.

Jesus is in the midst of our community as well. Those that were here last week heard Bishop Nyiwe of The Lutheran Church in Cameroon state that he felt Jesus present. And where there is Jesus, there is unity. Yet, where there is Jesus, there can also be fear as to what Jesus is up to in our midst – fear as to what Jesus can ask us to do!

And we can choose fear – we do have the will to choose – or we can choose another way – we can choose faith, knowing that the only way we choose faith is because we were first chosen by God through the cross of Christ – for the cross of Christ is the announcement of where God is! Isn't that why we gather together? We need to be reminded of God's presence with us? We can choose faith over fear because it is really not our choice at all, is it? God frees us from sin and from fear so that we can sit at the feet of Jesus, clothed in faith and in our right minds so that we too may return home and declare how much God has done.

For Jesus asks you as well, “What is your name?” Do you name what holds you captive – fear, anger, sadness, doubt – or do you claim the name that Jesus gave you and respond, “My name is child of God”? Jesus has freed you to be a saved person who can proclaim all that he has done for you.

Will fear choose you? Or will the faith that comes in being named a child of God choose you?

**Helpful resources**

**WorkingPreacher.org** – especially David Lose and written piece by Sarah Henrich

**RevGalBlog** discussion on Luke 8

Fred Craddock, **Interpretation commentary on Luke**

N.T. Wright, **The Crown and the Fire**

Roger Lovette, Reflections on the Lectionary, **Christian Century** magazine, June 15, 2010

Rolf Jacobson lectures and Bible studies at Book of Faith event and SD Synod Assembly 2010