



Lectionary 12, Year C

Bishop Daniel Beaudoin, Northwestern Ohio Synod
2nd Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Luke 8:26-39

Luke 8:26-39

²⁶Then [Jesus and his disciples] arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷As 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. ²⁸When 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”—²⁹for 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.) ³⁰Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. ³¹They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

³²Now 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. ³³Then 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.

³⁴When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then 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. ³⁶Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷Then 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. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be

with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "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.

SERMON TEXT:

Grace and Peace...

When we would try to slurp up the last drip of milkshake from the Styrofoam cup or squeeze out the last drop of Moon Mist from the pop bottle, my mother would say, "**When it's gone, it's gone. And when it's empty, it's empty**". And on this day, we are reminded once again, that when Jesus comes all that is empty, becomes all that is full (2x).

So, what brings you joy at the end of a long day? For some it's a slow walk around the neighborhood. For others it's the next chapter in a good mystery. Or the next episode in a binge-worthy series. Or a special snack like popcorn, or peanut butter & toast, or a bowl of cereal. For me, it's all about the ice cream.

And I know that there are some folks who insist on variety. There are some people who love to expand their palates, explore

distant horizons, and embark upon new endeavors. There are some people who make a habit of trying all kinds of different flavors. Like Butter Pecan. Or Moosetracks. Or Blue Moon. Or Peanut Butter and Chocolate. And that's fine. You do you! I'm not here to judge. Variety is the spice of life.

Except when it comes to ice cream. When it comes to ice cream, you go with familiarity, you go with tradition, you go with what is tried, and tested, and true. You don't go running off with pistachio. You don't go galloping off with Unicorn Swirl, whatever that is. You don't go getting involved with anything "low fat or low sugar", or Lord help us, "no fat and no sugar". You go with what you know. You go with what you like. You go with what you have always gone with before. Because you can never go wrong... when you go with... Mint Chocolate Chip. Can I get an Amen?

And preferably the Breyer's brand. Although, I am open to Turkey Hill, Velvet, Ben & Jerry's, Haagen-Dazs, and even Toft's. Mint Chocolate Chip is what I like. Mint Chocolate Chip is what I know, and Mint Chocolate Chip is what often awaits me at the end of a long day.

So, I got out my scoop. I got out my spoon. And I got out my bowl. My mother's voice echoed across space and time, "**You're going to spoil your supper**". But little would she know that this **was** my supper. I opened the freezer and felt the cool chill on my warm skin. I waited patiently for the frosty, frozen air to clear. I moved aside the chicken nuggets and the Eggo Waffles. I relocated the tater tots and the breakfast burritos. And there it was, bigger than life. A carton of Breyer's Mint Chocolate Chip All Natural Ice Cream. And in fine print, "*No additives and no preservatives.*" I carefully wrenched it from its frozen perch... which was right next to the frozen perch.

I prepared my scoop. I shined my spoon. I made sure the bowl was just right. Then I lifted the lid. I yanked off the top and was floored by a terrible sight.

It was anger at 1st, then shock, and then awe. It made me a woe-stricken griever.

That one of my own had finished it off and put empty back in the freezer.

**Now, it's happened with milk, and it's happened with juice.
It's happened with queso and dip.**

**But they've crossed the line; they've gone too far this time,
when they emptied my Mint Chocolate Chip.**

Empty can bring disappointment. And anger. And pain. Empty has a way of bringing us down. And it can be something as silly as an empty carton of Mint Chocolate Chip Ice Cream. Or something as serious as an empty hand, or an empty home, or an empty heart. I think about the things in this world that make me feel empty. Gun violence on our streets and in our schools and churches. Are there no longer any places that are sacred and safe? Addiction makes me feel empty. And all of us know someone who knows someone. Hatred makes me feel empty. And then there is racial injustice. And politics... on both sides of the aisle. The rising cost of groceries and gas. Seems as though there's an awful lot of empty out there.

Now we read in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus and his disciples leave the area of Galilee, and they sail to the country of the

Gerasenes. We know from archaeology that the country of the Gerasenes is a desolate place. An empty place. A place of sharp rocks and steep hills. A place where people bury their dead. And a place where people keep their pigs. This is a place of death and a place of defilement. This is not a place to pursue holiness. This is a dark place. This is a desolate place. This is an empty place.

But then Jesus steps out of the boat, and onto the shore, where he is confronted by a man from the city. Luke tells us that this man is plagued by demons... plural. He is demon-possessed. He is living his life in an empty place, and he is filled with an evil force. And evil has a way of stealing our humanity. Evil has a way of leading us to places that God never intends for us to go.

Here in Luke 8, we read about an empty man, with an empty heart, and an empty soul. We see it in his nakedness. He hasn't worn clothes in decades. We see it in his loneliness. He hasn't lived at home in years. Nor is he welcome in any of the nearby towns. We see it in his hopelessness. He lives in a cemetery. He abides among the tombs. He is surrounded by death and decay. We see it in his dreaded-ness, because when he sees Jesus, he

falls before him, and screams as loud as he can shout, "**What business do you have with me? You're Jesus, Son of the Most High God. I beg you. Do not torment me!**"

The man says this because Jesus commands the demon to come out of him. But this evil spirit loves living in "the empty" and is not all that eager to go. Time and again the demon throws this man into fits of rage. He must be kept under guard. Bound by shackles, locks, and chains, but driven by this demon, the man shatters the bonds and races off into the wild.

Jesus asks the man, "**What is your name?**" "**Legion,**" he answers. "**For we are many!**" And they beg Jesus not to drive them into the Abyss. That place where evil is contained and confined. The place where the power of the demonic is limited. The place from which they come, but where they do not wish to be.

The demons prefer the herd of pigs that is rooting on the hillside. And they beg Jesus to cast them into the swine, so Jesus gives the order. And crazed by the demonic, the pigs stampede over a cliff, and into the sea, where they drown.

The Bible says that those tending the pigs' race back into the village and tell the story to anyone who will listen. And some folks venture out into the empty to see for themselves. They find Jesus and the man, from whom the demons are now gone, sitting at Jesus' feet, wearing clean clothes, and in his right mind. It is a sacred event, and for just a moment they are more reverent than worried.

But then they all get together, they think it over, and they ask Jesus to go away. To leave. It is too much change, too fast, and they are frightened. So, Jesus gets back into the boat, and He departs. The man who is healed asks to go with him, but Jesus says no. **"Go back to your home. And tell everyone what God has done for you."** So, the man returns home and that's what he does. He tells everyone who will listen how much Jesus has done for him. How Jesus soothed his suffering. How Jesus healed his soul. How Jesus filled his emptiness.

You see, when Jesus comes all that is empty, becomes all that is full (2x). And child of God, you have been filled. You have been

filled with the love of God. And the love of God is a love that will never let you down and never let you go.

Now there will be things in this life... There will be things on this side of heaven that will let us down. People we dearly love will let us down. Our own bodies will eventually let us down. But the love of God in Christ Jesus will never let you down and let you go. That is the promise of the Gospel.

In his Letter to the Philippians, St. Paul shares an ancient hymn about Jesus. Who emptied Himself on the cross in order to save the world. ***“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death– even death on a cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on***

earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.

You see, when Jesus comes all that is empty, becomes all that is full (2x). And we are filled... filled with his love. Touched by his grace. Empowered by His presence. Filled, to do God's will. Inspired to walk in God's ways. And empowered to trust that in the crucified and risen Jesus, all that is empty will become all that is full.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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