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Emanuel's Ev. Lutheran Church, Bellevue (Pittsburgh), PA  
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Isaiah 65:1-9  
Galatians 3:23-29  
Luke 8:26-39

It is difficult for many of us to take seriously a Bible story like our gospel story today. Many of us hear it and think of the awful ways that such language has been used in the past. We can look into our medical history and see in new ways the same states that we once knew as demon possessions. Seizure disorders, like epilepsy, and various psychiatric disorders were stigmatized due to the demons.

It can be interesting to consider how we might understand this Gerasene's state. But often this just serves as a distraction to the history-loving scripture reader. Our gospel writers generally share their stories to communicate about how people saw God acting in their world in the person of Jesus Christ. I invite you to suspend any tangent curiosities for the moment. Let's see and hear the miracle with eyes and ears of faith. For those who are reading along in the gospel of Luke this summer, we will witness a whole collection of similar stories of Jesus confronting the demons in people's lives.

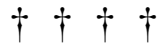
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Our gospel tells of a man whose life is controlled by the demons who tormented him. He was normally shackled and bound to protect both him and the community around him. In theory, these would help to keep everyone alive and safe. The demons effectively cut off this man's connection to real relationships. With them, he became someone who needs to be shunned in the name of caring. Perhaps people thought they would condone his odd behaviors – which were clearly not normal. Perhaps they feared that the demons might invade the lives of them or their children. Perhaps they earnestly worried about everyone's safety.

As often appears in the gospels, the demons saw Jesus' identity truly. "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" (*Luke 8:28*) They named him, even when humans weren't sure who Jesus was. They begged to be left alone, that they could continue exercising their tormenting power over this man's life. If Jesus had understood his existence to be only for Jews, he would not have been there to begin with. He would have stayed on the Jewish side of the lake – back in Galilee, where he came from. Or he could have walked away from this man, just as many of us walk away from strangers who ask for money or help on the street.

Jesus could have responded differently. Instead he commanded the demons to leave the man. Through Jesus, God reached out to release even this poor, Gentile soul from his bondage. He was restored to health. The man no longer needed to

wear chains. He was able to be with others once again. His life was transformed from its previous pale imitation – to a life of fullness.

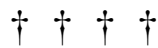


What are the demons that clamor to control you – or us, as a people? When placed next to God, we see the demons for what they are: Unhealthy powers that hold us hostage in unhealthy lives. What binds your hands or feet from living more fully? What holds us back from having healthy, generous and loving relationships with one another and with our world? We may be aware of them because of the ways our lives have changed for the worse – like the man in our lesson, banished and in chains. God may speak to us through the people around us, expressing concern for our well-being. It may be that the Spirit calls to our hearts in reflective moments. No matter how God reaches out to us, we are helped to name our discontents and dis-ease. We are invited to seek our deepest longings and heart's desires in God.

For God our Creator looks at our world and nothing is too far gone. For God, no place or person is unredeemable. No one's life is too broken for healing. No one is resigned to dwell in unhealthy torment, unless they choose it themselves. The

salvation that Jesus offers to the world is not just salvation for the world to come. It is salvation today from those things that capture us. With God, we can be healed.

For most of us, Jesus does not come and cast out demons with the snap of fingers, in a blink of an eye. Even for the man in our scripture lesson, the healing process was longer. Part of his life was healed in an instant by Jesus. Part of his life was healed when his community saw him and welcomed him back. Part of him was healed when he followed Jesus' command, and praised God's work in his life.



Similarly, God's healing is not something that happens for us alone. After invitation (after invitation, when we finally accept), the Holy Spirit does not leave us to deal on our own. God shares wisdom to guide us, and companionship along the way. Jesus holds out hands of care through the body of Christ on earth. They show us the way to healing and share God's love with us. How has that happened – or is that happening now – in your life?

Our AA friends who meet here at Emanuel's are being healed of the demon of addiction. They walk a spiritual path and disciple together, one started by Christians.

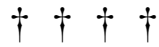
Emanuel's congregational council has begun consulting with resources from our Southwestern Pennsylvania Lutheran synod, so that we may be healed of our broken relationship with money. They are sharing possibilities for our ministry through which God may call Emanuel's to a new life of freedom. Everything is still in process – the congregation will be very much involved in the discernment and decision-making when the time is right.

Many of you know that medical folks are helping my mother cast out the demon of metastasized cancer. Centuries ago, hospitals first began as Christian homes of hospitality for those who needed care and healing. Now they are a grand industry, but one with roots deep in the body of Christ. The people who serve are doctors and nurses and technicians who are answering God's call to offer their gifts of service.

In the fall, our Presbyterian friends across the street will offer a two or three month course for individuals and families who seek financial healing. It is based on the ministry of Dave Ramsey, who helps to cast out unhealthy demons from the lives of many people.

Even our community of Bellevue is gathering for healing and restoration. There is a group of community leaders that meets every couple months. They are

discerning how Bellevue may welcome a new sense of life and energy in its businesses and neighborhoods.



God reaches out hands of healing and new life to us in so many ways. God also reaches out through us to help the world around us receive God's love and healing and to return to life as God would have it. As Christians, we understand that an important part of that healing is our response of praise. After being freed and healed, Jesus sends the man out. He is to go and share what God has done in his life. He has been restored to healthy relationships in his community. We do the same, sharing the good news of God working healing and salvation in the world today.