

Today's gospel is one of those Bible stories that is hard to believe, not because demon possession is so hard for us to understand, but so easy.

The man on the beach with no clothes is an eerily familiar picture of our own culture.

When Jesus asks the demon his name, he replies *Legion*, which an imperial Roman name for about 6,000 soldiers.

One Roman soldier is frightening enough, but an internal occupation of six thousand of them is a desperate picture indeed.

What resistance is there to six thousand well-armed, well-funded voices?

And that is where we understand.

It wouldn't take as long as we might think to name six thousand demanding voices in our heads as a collective culture: we are driven to our own raving madness by the cacophony of CNN and Facebook and junk mail and credit card companies and credit card relief offers and pundits and bloggers and lawsuits and NPR and People magazine and politicians and charitable causes and diet advice and political correctness and the gadget in our pocket that buzzes, beeps, plays Lady Gaga whenever our bad romance calls, and bombards us with email, text messages, picture messages, the Internet and at least a Legion of advertisers reaching through our pockets for a vice grip on our souls.

Our world has spun wildly out of control, and we suffer from information overload, and who can distinguish between the voices and sort out the good from the evil from the wise from the inane when they are all shouting at the same time and the volume only goes up?

Who has the luxury of time and economic stability and clarity to sift and sort through the voices with care?

The sheer tonnage of voices in our daily lives is an oil gusher we cannot cap or control, and the poison of it continues to seep and spread much faster than we are equipped to handle it.

It is no wonder the man on the beach lives among the tombs; only the dead have the decency and the kindness to stay quiet.

Legion isn't leaving.

We are powerless to stop it; sure, we can turn off the TV and the phone and the computer but then worry and wonder continues to buzz and throb in our pre-programmed, occupied heads and we just have to turn them on again.

There is no mute button for the madness, no top kill for the technology explosion, so we continue to convulse at the mercy of the merciless Legion that possesses us.

Enter Jesus.

He has the power to make it all stop, if we let him.

He comes offering peace and perspective.

The Legion of voices that invade and occupy us fear him because his word has the power to render them impotent.

His promise at baptism drowns the demons and gives us new clothing in a new community where status and competition and insecurity and all the shrieking panic that drives us to our destruction are buried at the bottom of the water.

Clothed in Christ, we are finally in our right mind, and we have the freedom and peace to sit unshackled and still at his feet.

We come here to worship, to hear live music and see real human faces instead of artificial voices and canned ring tones, to sit in the presence of Jesus long enough to be calmed down a little if not healed altogether.

But to listen to him, and to enjoy this sweet release, we have to turn off the cell phone.

We have to possess our possessions instead of letting them possess us, and often the only way to do that is to give them away.

That is one main reason why we have an offering--to let go of our most precious idol and in so doing to reclaim our own soul.

But there, so often, is the rub.

Salvation freely offered comes with a steep price.

When the pigs go off the cliff, when the assets become liquidated and the profit margin plummets and we can no longer make money off the chaotic status quo, we realize how possessed we really are, and how much we need the demons to stay in place to keep the economy stable.

We fancy that we really have mastered those demons, if not effectively managed them by marginalizing the people like the man from the tombs who can't seem to handle "reality."

The Legion that we fear is the devil we know, and we have enough graveyards and prisons and special facilities to keep the obviously possessed out of sight and out of mind enough that we can fool ourselves with the sweet illusion that really we're all okay.

Whatever we cannot control we push outside the borders of our town or neighborhood or schedule or budget or consciousness or consideration.

We manage to get along well enough and hope for the best for whoever doesn't, as long as they don't threaten our swineherd, the bacon we bring home, our bottom line.

But enter Jesus, and *now* we're scared.

There is nothing that frightens us so much as the man newly clothed with Christ sitting calmly in inexplicable peace.

There is nothing that frightens the world so much as the voice of Jesus exposing evil and restoring the scapegoated and caring more about people than profits.

That is why the world shackled him to a cross and quarantined him to the tombs and hoped like hell he would stay there.

That is why the world continues repeatedly asking him to leave.

And because he is a different and deeper kind of power, Jesus does.

He respects our worldly wishes and leaves us to go about our business if that's what we choose.

He refuses to act like Legion, he refuses to be imperial and possessive because he came to overcome that, not just replace it.

He ultimately defeats evil not by killing it but by dying on a cross where evil undoes itself with its own desperate grasp at self-preservation.

The world doesn't understand and doesn't want this kind of power, a power strong enough to be weak, a strength secure enough to walk away when it isn't wanted.

And yet, God refuses to leave the world to its own destructive devices.

God will not be without a witness.

Jesus may walk away from the threatened Gerasenes who do not want him there, but he does send them an ambassador.

It's the other man they are afraid of.

The one they once chained and shackled.
The one who really does have the power to forgive them and to teach them about restoration and the sweetness of a different way of life.
And just as Jesus sent the clothed man in his right mind to the town that once shunned him, he sends us into the marginalizing and misunderstanding world.
He sends us into the teeth of the trouble, clothed in a new community and a new way of life that is always met with confusion and fear.
This week's call is to attend the Lakeview Action Coalition assembly and stand up for the dignity and humanity of the marginalized among us, the homeless youth in our community, the adults who cannot afford a home in our community, the sick citizens who cannot pay their medical bills and the sick earth given no peace by a demonic human race bent on possessing and destroying it.
This week's call is to march in the Pride parade to show solidarity with the shunned and the demonized, to celebrate Pride with humility the same way Christ flexes muscle in service and perfects power in weakness.
This week's call is every week's call to be a community where all are embraced and equal at the table of mercy, baptized into Christ, no longer identified by gender or class or wealth or job or race or education or status or demonic division of any kind but treasured together as children of God.
We have to leave a lot behind at the bottom of the water to get there.
Dare we step forward to the table and the assembly and the parade and the fearful city, or will we just go back home and chain the door and once again ask Jesus to leave?