THE SUNDAY FOCUS

Weekly Worship from Gladsmuir & Longniddry Parish Churches

Issue 291 19th October 2025

Today's Bible readings

Reading: Luke 8: 26 - 39 (Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac)

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As 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. When 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'— for 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.) Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now 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. Then 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.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then 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. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then 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. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, '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.
AMEN. *(NRSV)*

Today's hymns

Father, we praise You (CH209)
O Lord, all the world belongs to you (SGP84)
Courage brother, do not stumble (CH513)
Look forward in faith (CH237)

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At face value, this story appears so alien to us, so first century, so caught up with things we just don't encounter in the 21st century – people possessed by demons and demons driving large numbers of pigs to drown themselves in the sea. It's just baffling! What can it possibly say to us in our time? Well, like many passages in Scripture, it needs to be interpreted sensitively to reveal what is applicable to us, so that it can speak to us in a fresh way.

First of all, is it so unusual in our time to find people whose condition, whose mental ill-health has so alienated them from their surrounding community, that they are effectively on the margins, living a fragile existence that could scarcely be call a human life. The man in this story has clearly experienced a downward spiral in his fortunes, being described as a man from the city – presumably once having had a home, gainful employment, maybe even a loving family – and now he has none of that. The people of his local community simply do not know what to do with him, they cannot help him, so they chain him up and simply try to contain the problem. He is now totally defined by his condition, his insanity, his schizophrenia or whatever was the root cause of his extreme behaviour. Does that not ring true for some people in the 21st century?

Now when Jesus encounters this man, his approach is totally different from that of the townspeople. In spite of the man's plea for him not to torment him, Jesus is there to do just the opposite, to bring healing. He is not afraid of the man or his demons. He does not see him as a hopeless case, a crazy individual for whom nothing can be done. He sees past the madman who is driven crazy by his condition. He sees a person, made in God's image, in whose life that image has been all but lost, but he has come to restore him, to save him and to give him the chance to experience life in all its fullness.

Let's focus on the name 'Legion', for its significance is deeply symbolic. As we all probably know, the literal meaning of the word 'legion' is a reference to a unit of 6000 soldiers in the Roman Army of the time. This man is so badly afflicted, he has thousands of demons destroying his life. He is fractured as a person into a multitude of different fragments. The polar opposite of this condition is to be made whole – "being made whole" is an expression we find in the King James Bible and is generally understood to be an experience of divine healing that spans not just physical health, but psychological and spiritual health. It is closely linked to the Old Testament concept of shalom, which means not just peace, but wholeness and well-being.

So we see that there is a continuum in the way that human beings present, when it comes to their health, seen as a holistic reality, encompassing one's full identity, physical, spiritual, social, emotional. Now, if we see the poor possessed man in Luke chapter 8 being at the shattered, fractured and fragmented end of the personhood continuum and Our Lord Jesus Christ being the one who most fully exemplifies wholeness, integration and fullness of life, the question is where do we fit

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along this continuum? We may be very quick to distance ourselves from the condition of the desperate man in this story, but are we entirely free of demons of our own?

It is quite helpful, I think, to reflect on the way the expression "facing your demons" or "confronting your demons" has become so embedded in approaches to self-help and personal development in our own time. We, as Christians, might see the battle with our demons as something to take on in God's strength and in the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than simply through a gritted-teeth effort of sheer will-power. Nevertheless, there seems to be a common idea that all of us have to deal with things that seek to control us, to weaken us, to strip us of joy or to prevent us from reaching our potential as human beings. It could be habits that we cannot seem to break or set ways of thinking that go right back to childhood and are not helpful to us at all but we cannot seem to shift them. It could be that we have physical conditions or ailments and we limit what we think we can do in response to these, so these physical frailties can partly define us. We may be unable to escape from the grief or pain of loss or the memory of hurts that linger in our consciousness, even when we have tried to forgive. It may be that we – or others around us – have suffered unjustly and cannot get rid of the anger and resentment about it. We know that anxiety, depression, addiction and mental illness are so widespread, that it is likely that several people here today will be actively battling with one or more of these demons and that almost all of us will know someone who is. So, as we begin to see, when we think about demons in this more everyday sort of way, we could all be called 'Legion'.

The main challenge I see in this passage is to honestly open my mind and heart to be willing to see those demons that are preventing me from being more completely whole. To believe more fully in the power of God to change me and the people I pray for. Not to settle for things as they are, as if the current state of things is as good as it gets. The thing about seeing ourselves as all being in some way fractured, lacking wholeness, being incomplete, is that it opens up the door to understanding others – especially seriously afflicted ones - more readily. It doesn't mean that we can necessarily be the ones to help them – some people are in such a terrible condition that they need skilled professional help to be led along the road towards healing. Some conditions cannot be cured so much as managed, and we can all pray for better services for many who are not well-served by our current mental health provision.

However, there is something we can all do, which is desperately needed in our very divided and increasingly harsh culture. We can demonstrate and model a way of treating with respect and acceptance all those who we might initially think of as "others", those who are very different from us or who have difficulties that we don't. For the divinely revealed truth of the matter is that we are all – without exception – made in the image of God and we are all on a journey towards becoming more like our maker…and not one of us has, so far, arrived! Amen.

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Praying for others

Dear Lord, our Heavenly Father, we pray for peace in the world. There are so many places where there are danger and fear and destruction and death. How wonderful it will be for our brothers and sisters to have an end to the war and dreadful distress in which they live.

Lord, we pray for peace for all people. Especially we are mindful of the peoples of Ukraine and Gaza and Israel.

Lord, we pray that justice may come everywhere – the prophet called for justice to run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream. Across the gulf of time, Lord, we hear the prophet's words and pray for justice.

We know we live in a good place and have enough and even plenty for our daily needs. We have our daily bread and so much more beside. Yet we are mindful that so many people have so little, not enough, dearth and want. We pray for cooperation among nations to bring about a good sharing of the world's abundance: food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, relief for the oppressed.

Lord, we pray for ourselves – our families, our friends, our church, our community. Give us all, brothers and sisters together, courage in our onward journeys in the lives and times which you have given us. We ask all, with humble hearts, in Jesus' name. Amen

Weekly Updates …

Blythswood Shoebox Appeal: The wrapped and filled shoeboxes for our annual appeal for Blythswood to send much-needed essentials to families in eastern Europe need to be in Church by Sunday 26th October (next Sunday!) please. Leaflets for the boxes can be found in the Gathering Space where boxes may be left too. Further details are available from Jim Couper.
New Age Kurling: Tuesdays from 2-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church.
Wednesday Club: From 2.30-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church. Come along and enjoy a variety of activities and tea/coffee. (Contact Janet: 07766 574123).
Sporting Memories Group: Thursdays from10.30am – 12 noon in Room 3, Longniddry Church.

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