

**From Madness to Stillness**

June 19, 2022

**Luke 8:26-39**

<sup>26</sup> Then they arrived at the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup> As he stepped out on shore, a man from the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had not worn any clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. <sup>28</sup> When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, shouting, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God? I beg you, do not torment me," <sup>29</sup> 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.) <sup>30</sup> Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. <sup>31</sup> They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

<sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd stampeded down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

<sup>34</sup> When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. <sup>35</sup> 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 became frightened. <sup>36</sup> Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. <sup>37</sup> Then the whole throng of people of the surrounding region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, for they were seized with great fear. So, he got into the boat and returned.

<sup>38</sup> The man from whom the demons had gone out begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup> “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.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19: 1-15a

<sup>1</sup> Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” <sup>3</sup> Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

<sup>4</sup> But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.” <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, “Get up and eat.” <sup>6</sup> He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. <sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, “Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you.” <sup>8</sup> He got up and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. <sup>9</sup> At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

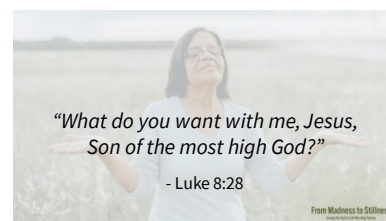
<sup>10</sup> He answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

<sup>11</sup> He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake, <sup>12</sup> and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” <sup>14</sup> He answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” <sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus.”



As we begin this time together, I invite you to consider a time in your life when there was chaos, confusion, unrest, disorientation, when you weren't sure what the next step was or even if you wanted to take a next step. Maybe you reached your limit, ready to throw in the towel, to just walk away from that job or relationship. Or maybe you wanted to but couldn't. You couldn't unravel the situation that had bound you up and stuck. In our passages today, this is the case for the demon-possessed man and for Elijah the prophet. Both men find themselves in very tough circumstances.

Towards the beginning of our passage from Luke 8, the demon-possessed man asks Jesus, *“What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God?”* This question was asked after Jesus had already instructed the demons to leave the man. But they don’t want to obey; they don’t want to come out. The demons know who Jesus is and they know what he can do. But they want to argue, to try and negotiate with Jesus. Does this sound familiar? How we try and get God to see things our way, to get God to do what we want God to do! Please join me in an attitude of prayer as we prepare for this time together...

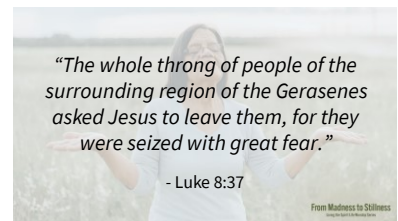


As we turn to Luke 8, we see that Jesus encounters a man who is naked and who lives in the tombs. He was long ago driven out of the village, left to survive on his own, an example of what happens when one dabbles in evil. Although far away from the villagers, the man still served as a reminder of what can happen. The man was alone, living in torment, existing without any connection to community. Jesus saw him and had compassion for him. Pause with me for a moment and think about who you know that is living in isolation, that is broken and hurting, that needs or longs to become a part of community. Who do you know that is like this man that Jesus heals? Who do you know that exists on the edges, on the fringe?

Our story begins with Jesus trying to get rid of the problem – to free this man from the demons that have long dwelled within him. Until the negotiations begin.

Jesus is the same way with us. Jesus knows what we need – the Spirit will even tell us. But Jesus is willing to let us choose, to let us decide for ourselves. Jesus lets us choose, even when our choices or decisions make matters worse. In our passage, Jesus was just going to send the demons out, back to the abyss. But in verse 31 we read, *“They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.”* The demons tried to negotiate, tried to have a hand in determining the outcome. The demons ask instead to be sent into the pigs. Jesus allows this to happen. Isn’t it ironic that they end up in the abyss anyway as the pigs, now possessed by this legion of demons, rush down the hillside to drown in the lake? The thing they wanted to avoid becomes their fate. It was theirs to choose. Jesus lets them because that is what they asked for.

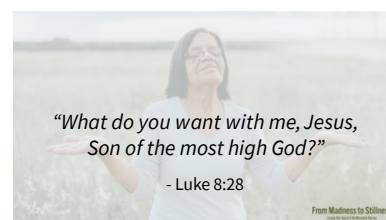
Later, when news hits town, the villagers come and ask Jesus to leave. Instead of sensing what Jesus offers, they simply want him to leave. It was fear that caused them to ask. Finding the one who had been crazy, who had been out of his mind, sitting and dressed and in his right mind – it scared them. This change unsettled them. The villagers had gotten used to this man being out on the fringe, out where he could be pointed to as an example, as a warning to one another. The outsider, the other, was now one of them. This scares them. In verse 37 we see that *“the whole throng of people of the surrounding region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, for they were seized with great fear.”* They ask Jesus to leave, to allow them to be safe, to not cause any more change to occur. So Jesus leaves. After all, it is what they asked for.



The villagers wanted to maintain the status quo. It was nice having that deranged man living in the tombs, having the one they could point to. It felt good to have someone well below them on the social ladder. We're not unlike these villagers. We like it safe. We dislike change. We like to have our place in the pecking order, so long as it's not at the bottom. And when Jesus begins to stir us up inside, when Jesus begins to bring change to our lives, we too can react as they did, being filled with fear, asking Jesus to leave us alone. Sometimes we are afraid of the growth or change that Jesus will seek in us. Jesus does not force his way with us either. Even though he knows what is best for us, Jesus lets us choose. Through it all, Jesus just wants to love us, to care for us, to make us into our best possible self. But we're selfish. So we shy away from the whispers and the nudges of the Holy Spirit.

There is also another reason that we sometimes ignore the whispers and the nudges. We think we can handle this on our own. We think we can manage it. In these moments we are really saying to Jesus, "I've got this." No need for help. All is A-okay here Jesus. Even though it really isn't okay. We put up a façade and Jesus lets us choose this path. It is what we sometimes ask for.

What a contrast we find in our Luke 8 text. The demon-possessed man, the one who asked, "*What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God?*" this man becomes the one who begs to stay with Jesus. The fear that wanted Jesus to leave them alone, it becomes a love that desires to draw closer and closer to Jesus. In his right mind, dressed and filled with faith, all he wanted to do is be with Jesus.



When Jesus has become real in our lives, guiding us through a dark valley or helping us out of a hole we've dug for ourselves, when that happens, aren't we like the man? Don't we just want to remain in that holy presence? But Jesus has better plans. He tells the man, no, you need to stay here, *"Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you."* Go and tell the story of what has been done for you. Go to those villagers that asked me to leave and tell them what I've done for you. Moving from a mind of madness to a mind of stillness focused on Christ, having been rescued from a life of loneliness, brokenness, and despair, now knowing joy and worth and belonging, he is directed to share the story of what Jesus did for him with all he meets. I believe that is what Jesus wants for us too – to tell the story of what Jesus has done for us, to tell of how Jesus has changed our lives.

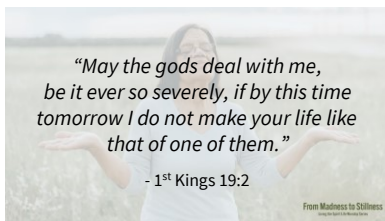


As we seek to walk as a disciple of Christ, we too will be changed, transformed by God, just like the demon-possessed man. As we are transformed, we experience more and more the stillness of heart and mind that comes with knowing Christ. Even though the voices of the world seem like madness, loudly calling out, encouraging us to turn inward, to be self-focused, the voice of God strains to remain at the center of our heart, just as wisdom called out last week from the city gates. God's voice ever calls us to be outwardly focused, to consider the needs of others before the wants of self. To hear this call, we have to still ourselves. We have to be willing to set self aside. We have to be willing to quiet those other voices. Sometimes, my friends, this is hard to do, isn't it? Turn with me to 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19 as we explore Elijah's struggle to hear the voice of God amidst the noise and threats around him.



Elijah was a prophet of God who lived about 800 years before the coming of Jesus. At this point in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, Elijah has come to the end of his strength and to the end of his own wisdom. In chapter 18 Elijah has just defeated 450 prophets of Baal – one of the local gods. Calling down fire from heaven, the sacrifice and the altar and all the water were consumed. Renewing the people’s awareness and awe of God, Elijah directed them to slaughter the prophets of Baal.

News of this reaches Jezebel, King Ahab’s wife and a follower of Baal. It is she that



threatens Elijah, saying, *“May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”* In response, Elijah flees for his life. In desperation, Elijah begs for God to take his life.

Instead, God feeds and strengthens Elijah. Only through the strength that God provided could Elijah continue his journey. He was ready to give up. We’ve all been there, haven’t we? We’ve all been to a place of despair, of surrender, of just wanting to quit. Or we’ve known someone who was there, someone who was ready to give up.



Sustained by God, journeying 40 days through the wilderness, Elijah comes to Horeb, the mountain of God. Hiding in a cave on the mountain, God comes to him and

asks, *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”* In response Elijah says, *“I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword...”*



*I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.*” In essence, Elijah felt abandoned, all alone, persecuted, hated. In this sense, he felt a lot like that demon-possessed man, didn’t he? He felt like there was no strength left. In a way, he was implying that God had abandoned him. Taking no offense, God instructs Elijah to go and stand at the entrance to the cave, to wait for God’s presence to pass by.

A great wind roars and shatters rocks. A great earthquake rattles things and then a raging fire blazes just outside the cave. But God is not in any of this. Then, in verse 12 we read, *“And after the fire came a gentle whisper.”* Elijah recognized God’s voice – the still small voice. It is like that voice that whispers in the back of our mind when we steel ourselves for a difficult task. It is the voice of God. It is the voice of hope. Wrapping the mantle of his cloak around his face, Elijah steps to the entrance to the cave.



Now that God has Elijah’s attention, God asks again, *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”* And Elijah responds much as he did before, saying, *“I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”* He was trying his best. Elijah sees how the people have rejected God, how they have killed the prophets. In spite of his successful endeavor against the prophets of Baal, he still feels like he is the only one left.



Instead of confronting Elijah, God simply sends him on to the desert of Damascus. God has plans for Elijah. God will continue to walk with Elijah for many years to come.



Here in the life of Elijah, God does not come in the madness of these destructive forces – in the wind or in the earthquake or in the fire. Sometimes that is how we seek God too – in the big and showy ways. Often, we want to encounter God in ways that are obvious and amazing and too powerful to leave room for any doubt. There are those moments too. Here in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19, though, God works in the quieter, more common ways. The truth is, we encounter God most often in this way. We encounter God in everyday ways. Some might call it coincidence or happenstance. Yet when we are in tune with that still small voice, we recognize God at work in and through all that happens around us. God is ever present, always acting, in our lives and in our world.

Sometimes when we are like the demon-possessed man – when we allow Jesus to remove those things that keep us separated – there we find healing. Healed, we can listen to that still small voice. And sometimes when we are like Elijah, afraid and hearing only the voices of the world, allowing that doubt and fear to rise up. In this place, we struggle to hear the voice of God. In these times we must become still ourselves, finding solace in God’s quiet yet strong presence. It is then, once quieted ourselves, that we can once again hear that still small voice.

In our texts from Luke 8 and 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19, the theme is one of redirection. In these texts God is giving us an invitation to refocus, to reorient. We are being invited to turn away from the multi-voiced madness of the world to the singular call of Christ. If we, like Elijah, are willing to allow God to work, then the Spirit will have a word for us. Through the Holy Spirit's presence we will find a way to hear the voice of God. This week, my friends, may we seek God's presence, allowing God to move us to hope, to mission, and to service. May it be so. Amen and amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. Recently, when have you disobediently asked Jesus, “What do you want with me?” How can you move from disobedience to obedience?
- 2) *Pray*. How or when have you heard the still, quiet voice of the Spirit lately? Seek strength and guidance for following that voice.
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 8:42b-48 (the healing of the woman). How is this healing different from Legion's healing? How is it similar?