

Evil: Conspirators with or Conquerors of?

The scary thing in this passage is the demons. But there are two different sets of demons here – or rather two different kinds of evil. There is the legion of demons which have possessed the Gerasene demoniac. And, there are the demons, or the evil, that possess the people of the surrounding country who come to witness the healing.

Demons, in this case, are nothing more than the personification of evil. So, when you read the word demon – understand that what we are really talking about is evil. But, this is a narrative story of Jesus event rather than a theological treatise. So, demons are the means to express the condition and presence of evil in the life of the demoniac.

The legion of demons who have the conversation with Jesus and drown themselves in the lake get all the attention. But, what about the demons that possess the people who have come to the countryside to see the cured demoniac? These people are afraid of the sane demoniac. They are afraid of the man who is sitting at Jesus' feet who is clothed and in his right mind. And they are afraid of Jesus.

These are pretty key indicators of evil. When the people ask Jesus to leave – it is clear that something is wrong with this picture! When what is known and recognized to be good, Jesus and healing, creates fear - then demons are most certainly still present. Evil is clearly resisting good.

The people from the city and the countryside were used to living with evil. They were used to living with the demoniac outside the town, shackled and rattling around in the tombs. The demoniac wasn't bothering them and he wasn't hurting them. The demoniac was really, at most, a bit of an inconvenience for them.

Every once in a while they had to track him down after he broke his shackles - but he always ran into the wild rather than toward the city. And so they would get new shackles for him and treat his wounds. And, yes, he had to be guarded – but that gave someone a job and also took away any personal responsibility for the demoniac. As long as he wasn't a danger to anyone else and as long as the only one he was hurting was himself – it was no problem to keep him safely away from them under lock and key. His welfare didn't really matter as long as their safety and welfare was protected.

American society reflects this same mindset. As long as those criminals, those addicts, those disabled people, the mentally ill, those homeless people are kept in prison, in rehab, in that school for the deaf / blind / developmentally disabled, or in that

institution, in that shelter all is good. As long as somebody-families and friends- or something else –like government agencies or prisons or hospitals or homeless shelters - are responsible for them we are all good. As long as those people do not effect my safety or my day-to-day life – this is all good.

It is okay for that evil to continue over there or in that person's life as long as it doesn't impact me. It is the spiritual equivalent of "Not in my back yard." I have no problem dumping all that evil stuff on you, but don't you dare think about dumping that evil mess on me.

Well, Jesus walks in and says, "This is not okay in my garden." It is not okay to permit a human being to be tormented and tortured in my garden. It is not okay to have someone hurting so much that s/he can't even recognize help and good and healing when it stares them in the face – as Jesus did. So, the Good Gardener shows up to pull some evil weeds out of his garden so that the demoniac's life can bloom. Jesus weeds out the legions of evil weeds and sets the man free. Jesus then clothes the man.

John S. McClure says that, "...

*God, in Jesus Christ, has the power to triumph over the power of evil. For Luke it was important that this power was **demonstrated**. Luke reminds us today that the church must be willing to demonstrate that Christ can overcome the power of evil in the world...the church should be prepared to stand up to evil and to show others, through bold action, what can be done to get rid of the evil that has taken over the lives of so many. The church exists to challenge and to demonstrably destroy the evil that has taken control of human life.¹*

So, we can be the people **so possessed** by the evil demons of our comfort and our safety and our personal concerns that we tell Jesus to get out of town and let people suffer lives of living hell...or we can be the called people of God, followers of Jesus Christ, who take a demonstrable stand against evil in our town, in our community. We can be the people who clean up the garden by ripping out the weeds of evil – the evil weeds of homelessness, poverty, domestic violence, child abuse and molestation, drug and alcohol abuse.

It isn't necessarily our responsibility to conquer the whole legion – we are one church amongst many churches in our town and county. But, we can take a committed and focused stand to eradicate one evil weed in the garden. What ministry shall we

choose? Let's dig in and get our hands dirty pulling some weeds so that we can deliver someone, lots of someones, from evil – right here in this plot of God's good garden.

I want each of you to take a scribble sheet and write down 3 local evils you believe that we as the people of Grace should actively and committedly work to cast out from our community. Place your list in the offering plate when it comes around. Please do so **now**.

ⁱ *Proclamation-Pentecost 1: Interpreting the Seasons of the Church Year*. Proclamation 5, Series C. John S. McClure. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994, pp. 39-40.