

Grace Presbyterian Church, Orleans
“Jesus: Authoritative, Firm and Kind”
Luke 8: 26-39
Pastor Jonathan

June 23, 2019

I like to think of myself as a pretty realistic guy. I don't go overly pessimistic, negative or sarcastic. I try not to see only the brokenness inherent in humanity as the result of the Fall, and peoples' ongoing choice to sin, whether they know it or not. I also don't go overly optimistic, saying every thing will turn out wonderful and rosy in this life, because each of us struggle through our own brokenness and that of those around us, and institutional faults hit us on top of this. I try to be realistic, and acknowledge that it will be okay. This is not to belittle anyone here who is either an optimist or a pessimist. We all lean in certain directions, based on our life experiences.

But one Person we all have in common is Jesus. He is the reason we are here. He has not been surprised or shocked by the turn of events here in the last weeks. He knows what's going on in my heart and yours, in our congregation and in our denomination.

He navigates what we are going through. He hears us. He knows what we need. We have to go back to Him to understand what we are going through individually, as a congregation and as a denomination. We look to the Scriptures to guide us into a right understanding of who Jesus is and how He leads us in this time. Without the Scriptures, we can only guess what to do and be like, and that is not helpful. But with the Scriptures, we can see various aspects of how Jesus helps us, guides us, and loves us. We can see the consistency of his love.

We see Jesus in Dr. Luke's gospel being in the boat with the disciples. (8:22-25) Turn there for a moment. We didn't read this passage that occurs just before the Garasene/Gadarene demon possessed man. We see Jesus get into the boat, with these accomplished fishermen at the helm, who know the Lake backwards and forwards. They will navigate without question. Jesus takes a nap. But then the storm hits and Jesus stays asleep.

Perhaps you are feeling that we are in the midst of a storm in our congregation, in our denomination and in our personal relationships and Jesus is asleep in the boat. Perhaps you are wondering if we will survive as

a denomination, or perhaps if you don't care much about that, if we will survive as a congregation, or simply if you will continue attending this church. Yes, we are in a storm. Yes, there are squalls of many kinds hitting this boat. Yes, there is reason to be afraid. But yes, Jesus is present. Do we need to rouse him or awaken him, as the disciples did? I believe He is fully awake and with us. He doesn't need sleep like He did in his earthly ministry.

And I believe he asks us now the exact question he asked his disciples during the storm on the lake. As they are focusing on the storm, and telling Him how we are about to drown. He gets up. He stands up in the boat. He tells the wind to stop blowing and the water to stop raging.

Now take a moment and let Him do that in your life. Are the winds of what is happening here blowing you over? Are the waves of the culture and the spirit of the age rocking your world? Let Jesus calm them, right now. Look in his eyes. Will it be okay? Yes, it will.

The storm subsides. All was calm. Do you know that Jesus has taken you to the peaceful place of trusting Him? The water below the boat is still deep enough to drown in. The direction and place of the boat in the lake has not changed. But Jesus is in charge. May I suggest if you ever get panicky, or badly distracted, or terribly anxious about our congregation, our denomination or your place here, please focus on Jesus. We have nowhere else to turn. Well, we can turn to other places and people, but they won't help and cannot help us the way our Lord can.

And as we process where we are and what we should do, Jesus asks us: Where is your faith? Why is it that when the storms come, we find it hard to trust Him? Do we not believe the One who commands the winds and the water? He is better than any weatherman.

I know it's been hard for me. I get anxious. I wonder if I've spent my adult life of 35 - 40 years in the wrong direction. I wonder, just like you wonder. But if it has been in Jesus' direction, and not this or that congregation, or any particular denomination, then I can rest assured. We need to remember that we must give an account to Him. He is able to take that which I have committed to Him against that day. (2 Timothy 1:12) I am not ashamed, to be here, to trust Jesus here, and into the future as God leads. I hope you are not ashamed either.

Let's go on to see what Jesus does, now that he lands in the region of the Garasenes, southwest of Lake Galilee. My tour with Rev. Doug Rollwage went there in the Fall of 2017. There had been a town called Gadara, so the man affected by demons, takes either the regional name Garasene or the town name of Gadarene, because we don't have his actual name recorded in Scripture. Now all we see is the ruins of a monastery near there, seemingly 500-1000 m from the Lake. Today it would be a long run for those pigs.

We have just learned that Jesus has authority over the weather patterns. Now we will learn, with Dr. Luke's help, that Jesus has authority over the spiritual patterns in our lives. He steps ashore and is immediately confronted by the demon possessed man.

We only have a terse description of his life. We know he is a bit different. He was homeless. He lived in the graveyard. He didn't like to wear clothes. So we know he would be a problematic visitor at our church. But Jesus is going into his home territory. Jesus is doing pastoral visitation. And he finds out more than he may have wanted to know. But this doesn't phase Jesus. He still talks to him. Jesus still cares for him, even after the man talks to him, rightly identifying Jesus as Son of the Most High, and pleads with him to not torture him or send him to hell.

What I note in the middle of this conversation with the demon oppressed man is Jesus' kind yet firm nature. Jesus is not wanting to torture this man in any way. This man has gone through a lot. Dr. Luke tells us that this man had been chained and jailed in every way, even kept under guard, but no jail or jailer or chain could hold him. The man was supernaturally powerful. But not in a good way. The demon oppressed or possessed man was being tortured by the evil presence within. And we don't know the man's background, nor what happened to him that he should be so bothered and inhabited by not only one demonic presence but many. It is likely the demonic oppressed man had invited such a presence, but we do not know for sure. It is another warning to us that there is a power in this life that opposes Jesus and God the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is evil that we can choose, and there is a demonic reality that we are to avoid and not be curious about, as we are to be excellent in what is good but innocent of evil, as Paul says at the end of Romans 16:9. And if you have given yourself to evil in any way, please ask for help to renounce such devilish intentions, and to be clear in your allegiance to Jesus, not to demonic powers or institutions.

We don't have much about this man, but we know his fears, or the demonic fears that they would be told to go to hell (or the Abyss, the waiting room for hell, see also Revelation 9:1, 20:1-3). And notice that Jesus doesn't simply tell them to go to hell. He firmly and kindly accepts their request. They transfer to the group of pigs, the younger ones would be called in English: a drift, a drove or a litter; and the older ones being called a sound of swine, a team or hassel of hogs and a singular of boar. Sorry to bore you with that English language moment. Jesus grants their request and lets them all go into the pig farm. Now please remember we are talking about Israel where it would have been illegal for pig farmers to be there, although they certainly could have been Gentiles, but there is no mention of that. This is a judgment on the demons and those who are breaking the law. And yet it is a kindness that Jesus would listen. He listens to you and to me. He listens to the worst of sinners, and to the most afflicted. He is here listening. I am so struck by this, that I don't pay much attention to the commentators that say this was an environmental disaster or financial disaster, as the townspeople ask Jesus to leave.

Here is Jesus caring for this one poor man, now in his right mind, and dressed. I relate to that one man. I hear Jesus rejecting the crowd for that one man. And I also hear Jesus commissioning that one man to be a missionary for the Garasene region and the township of Gadara. Jesus' words of commission are simple: "Return home (where everyone knows you), and tell how much God has done for you." Isn't that a mission commission for us all today? It's what hangs over our door as you go out. "You are now entering your mission field." And what are we to do? Simply tell our family and friends and everyone who will listen, how much Jesus has done for us. And that is what that man, whose name we don't know, did. How have you been transformed by God? Tell that story, please. Invite others to know Jesus.

Jesus meets us where we are. God met Elijah where he was, in that lonely place. In 1 Kings 19, following an amazing victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah finds himself being pursued by the royal hit squads that Queen Jezebel has ordered. He is not a military man like David. He runs away. He is scared, suicidal (praying for God to take his life), depressed (not eating and feeling alone). He too experiences storms: winds, earthquakes, forest fires, and still feels exceptionally lonely and depressed. But God tells him he has 7000 others who still worship the LORD, which is likely not a census number, but a number indicating seven (just the right amount) times 1000,

which is a whole bunch. God has many who will worship Him aright and you won't be alone, Elijah. Just do a couple more mission trips, and you'll be fine. God knows what we need. He uses us to help others who will lead behind us. He anoints the next king of Israel, and he appoints Elisha to succeed him in his prophetic office. God does not leave his people without a leader. You will have the right leadership here at Grace. God will make sure you have the right leadership. Just keep trusting Him. And don't leave prematurely. I'm not saying, "Never leave." We all must trust God in these days for where we worship and what we do. But make sure at least that you hear the decision next Summer for what the Presbyterian Church is doing, it is not final yet. Please stay and pray.

Thank you for caring for me and my family in these days. We need each other. And Jesus will be faithful. Focus on Him.

Let us pray.