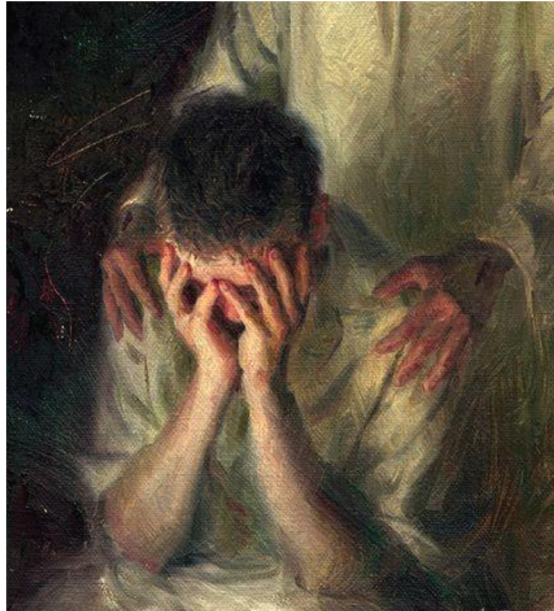


# The Healing Power of God

by Rev. John C. Cheek



## Prayer of Illumination

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.  
Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Scripture: Luke 8:26-39 (NIV)

### Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man

<sup>26</sup>They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. <sup>27</sup>When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. <sup>28</sup>When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" <sup>29</sup>For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

<sup>30</sup>Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied because many demons had gone into him. <sup>31</sup>And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

<sup>32</sup>A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. <sup>33</sup>When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

<sup>34</sup>When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, <sup>35</sup>and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. <sup>36</sup>Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. <sup>37</sup>Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

<sup>38</sup>The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup>"Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## Introduction

Luke's Gospel shows God's love and compassion for the outsiders, including foreigners, tax collectors, and women. He tells this story for maximum effect, rather than for strict chronological accuracy of the events. The area where this morning's story takes place is on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is a Gentile place, where none of the Jewish cleanliness rules are practiced.

Immediately preceding in this chapter, Jesus has invited the disciples to go with him across the Sea of Galilee, which is a lake about one-third the size of Lake Tahoe.

1. A storm comes up, which wasn't uncommon on that lake.
2. The boat is being tossed in a way that water is coming inside.
3. The disciples run to Jesus, who is asleep, and wake him up.
4. Jesus calms the storm, then criticizes the disciples for their lack of faith.
5. The disciples are amazed.

## SERMON – The Healing Power of God

### I. The text.

- A. (v. 26–31) They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.
1. (v. 27) When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. *[For the disciples, this was doubly troubling. The modesty of the people of Israel would have made the sight of the naked man a scandal, and the fact that he lived among the dead in the tombs would have marked him as unclean.]*
  2. (v. 28) When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? *[Do you remember the story we looked at two weeks ago concerning the servant girl who was possessed of a demon? The demonic powers always recognize Jesus for who and what he is, regardless of what humans know or don't know.]* I beg you, don't torture me!"
  3. (v. 29a) for Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man.
  4. (v. 29b) Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into the solitary places.
  5. (v. 30a) Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" *[In many cultures there was the understanding that to know someone's name was to have a kind of power over them.]*
  6. (v. 30b & 31) "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. *[A Roman legion would have contained somewhere between five thousand and six thousand soldiers.]* And they *[the demons]* begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. *[The Abyss was understood to be the watery underworld prison where impure spirits were punished.]*
- B. (v. 32 & 33) A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside.
1. (v. 32b) The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission.
  2. (v. 33) When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. *[The spirits ended up in the watery torture they had been trying to avoid.]*

- C. (v. 34–37) When those herding the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and the countryside. *[You can almost hear them saying, "This wasn't our fault! The demon-possessed guy was with these foreigners and all of a sudden, all the pigs ran off the cliff into the lake! Pigs never do anything like that! Not our fault!"]*
1. (v. 35a) And the people *[from the town and other parts of the countryside]* went out to see what had happened.
  2. (v. 35b) When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out
    - a. sitting at Jesus' feet *[in the posture of a student]*
    - b. dressed
    - c. and in his right mind
    - d. and they were afraid. *[They are not overjoyed at the fact that the man had been healed, nor at the fact that he has been restored to the community. Their only response is fear.]*
  3. (v. 36) Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.
  4. (v. 37) Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to *[stay and teach them? No. To stay and heal others in the community who are sick? No.]* to leave them, for they were overcome with fear. So he got in the boat and left.
- D. (v. 38 & 39) The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but
1. (v. 38b) Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." *[Jesus commissions this Gentile man as a missionary with a message to carry in that region.]*
  2. (v. 39) So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

II. **What can we take away from this text this morning? What do we need to know and to do to make this story our own?**

**First, we're in the business of crossing boundaries.** If Jesus and the disciples had stayed on the west coast of the lake, they would have been in familiar territory. They would have been in their comfort zone. They would have been able to find people who were sick and people who were possessed of demons. They would have been in their element.

But what did they do? They went to the east coast of the lake, out of the Jewish areas and into the Gentile ones. And what do they encounter there? A naked man possessed of a demon, a man who lives among the dead and is unclean all the time. A place where a whole herd of pigs on a hill is no big deal. It would have been clear to them that they weren't in Kansas anymore.

And what was the result of this boundary-crossing that Jesus and the disciples do? Only that a man is rescued from demon-possession. Only that he's restored to a healthy state. Only that he is restored to his family. Only that the healing power of the God of the Universe was shared among a completely new and alien people.

It's good for us to cross the boundaries of our own self-consciousness. I can't tell you the number of people who, with a little encouragement, have left their comfort zone and made a huge difference in the Kingdom of God. Is God nudging you to go outside your comfort zone? And, if so, are you listening?

**Second, we need to have the courage to engage with that which we find frightening.** Everything about the demon-possessed man in this story would have been repulsive and frightening to the disciples. Everything in them must have wanted to tell Jesus, "Just keep walking. There's nothing for us here. Let's just take a nice boat ride back to where we belong." But Jesus engages not only the man, but the legion of demons which had possessed him. Jesus doesn't retreat. He engages, and he uses the considerable resources at his command.

What are the things you're afraid of, and how can you engage those things? What is God inviting you to try? Many of the very best things that have happened in my life have come as a result of me engaging the things that frighten me. Twenty-five years ago, it would have been the easiest and safest thing in the world for me to have stayed on the Tucson Police Department, serving on the south side and working toward a retirement pension. In my mid-forties, the idea of going back to school to do a Master of Divinity degree, of having to learn how to read both Hebrew and Greek, of making a significant change of direction in my life, all these things were daunting, by which I mean terrifying. And yet, serving as a pastor is exactly what God had been preparing me for throughout my lifetime, using both the good and the bad to make me someone who could serve in the Kingdom. There can be rich rewards to engaging that which is frightening to us.

**Third and finally, as those who have been by grace alone granted reconciliation with God Almighty, we have a mission priority, you and I have a mission priority which is non-negotiable.** Sisters and brothers, you and I are in the business of reconciliation and restoration. That's who we are.

Because we as Americans are so deeply moved by independence, we may not understand the magnitude of the man's healing. In his state of demon-possession, he was estranged from everyone in his life. Did he have parents who were worried about him? Did he have a wife? Did he have children? Imagine the homecoming when he

returns to all of them, properly clothed, rational in both his thoughts and in his speech.  
Imagine the celebration that was brought about by Jesus' compassion for this man.

My friends, God calls us to cross borders, to engage that which frightens us, and to be agents of healing, reconciliation, and restoration. Are we listening?

May it be so. Amen

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