

The Human Condition (Luke 8:26-39)

10:00am Holy Communion – 22nd June 2025

Luke 8:26-39

Jesus and his disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasa, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out onto the 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' — 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 Gerasa 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.

<prayer>

Sophie and I recently returned to our usual holiday-haunt on the island of Gozo. It's a small place – just 8x16 miles, and you have to get a boat over to it from mainland Malta. Perhaps what most appeals to us is that it's off the beaten track of mass-tourism. Visiting Gozo feels like going to live with the local people, in the normality of their daily lives – **in their basic human condition.**

Personally, I find Gozo fascinating because it is a very faithful Christian society. The churches on Gozo are all breathtaking – huge and many of them. In even in the smallest of villages there is a vast church. Everything on the island is built of a honey-coloured sandstone in most ornate ways, with red and golden domes, and great clock towers. Every space inside is painted or gilded in bright colours of gold, marble and tapestries.

But there is one church in Gozo which is a bit different, because it was established as a shrine to a miracle attributed to the Virgin Mary. It's known as Ta Pinu, and it was built only in the last thirty years. Contained within the shrine is something I have never seen in any other church, then or since. Separated from the main worship space are a number of simple passageways into which the people of Gozo have been able to contribute some item or story of how the healing power of prayer has worked in their lives.

<Ex-Votos (offerings of thanks or vows fulfilled)>

<Plaster casts, motorcycle helmet, newborn baby grows, crutches.>

The local people of Gozo all have to face the same perils in their daily lives that we too may have to bear. **Their human condition is the same as ours – the joys and the disasters of health, welfare and economy.** Yet

for the people of Gozo there seems no hesitation that they should approach Christ in prayer for hope and thanksgiving, and those who visit Ta Pinu are left in no doubt about the worthiness of doing so by the many examples that festoon the passageways that surround the church. **The people of Gozo simply want to tell everyone of the grace that they have received. They wish to tell of how much God has done for them – so there is an echo of today's gospel story.**

St Luke was himself a *physician*, aware of the many variations in the human condition, and how medical and healing potential of Jesus Christ, should be trusted, sought out, and invested **with a great sense of hope.** Luke is a great universal – being the gospel which identifies most closely with the gentiles, with women and with those considered beyond the pale for whatever reason. **And into the middle of this broad view, he places Jesus Christ as accepting of all people.** Today's quite long gospel reading is one such example – the demon possessed man of Gerase.

<pause>

Jesus has once again crossed Lake Galilee in a boat, after two things have happened. Firstly, a lot of teaching to a great crowd – legions of them who follow Jesus wherever he goes – they can't get enough of him. Secondly, whilst crossing the lake, Jesus calms the storm. All in the boat are tired and ragged, so upon arriving at the far side, they intend to rest in the gentile territory of Gerase. But immediately Jesus is confronted by a crazed man who is possessed by many demons – indeed a whole crowd of them it seems (and remember here Luke's interest in the human condition). This highly-uncouth fellow apparently lives naked amongst a collection of tombs – a place understood by everyone as only hopelessness and death.

You get the impression that this man was notorious, foaming with every curse and avoided like the plague. His own body and personality have been hollowed-out and replaced by demons who now provide his mind and his voice. *'As Jesus stepped on land, a man who had demons met*

him. 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.'

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. If this is a comparison to a Roman legion, then we are looking at over five thousand. **Luke wants to tell us of the scale of challenge that Jesus was able to confront - no one is beyond the healing touch of Christ.** Isn't it interesting how these demons recognise the power of Jesus, and their own inability to resist him. **I wonder, is it possible for a person to wish to remain in their sinful lives, even when they know that there is a greater person and a better place to which they can seek salvation? Can the goodness of Jesus Christ be simply rejected like that?** Sadly, it is very common.

So, a herd of pigs (or swine) are then brought into view. Remember that we are not in Jewish lands, but even so, Luke's readership is given the impression that these pigs are on the bad side of the story. Knowing that the game is up the demons volunteer to transfer themselves to the pigs – it's all very weird. Jesus seems happy to negotiate the transaction, rather than simply transfer them into straight into the abyss, like as other times he has cast out demons. **But we are left in no doubt that all evil will find its hopeless death in the end, as these pigs then make their demented charge towards their own doom, drowning in the lake.** Mind you, this is no holy water of baptism – they go down to the depths and they never come back up again.

The story then changes to the reaction – and this is more the point.

Those keepers of the pigs run-off in amazement and alarm to tell the story to the local people, who then come **en-mass** to see the result. 'The 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.' We are

told that 'all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasa asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. Jesus got into the boat and returned.' So, those who saw what happened, who witnessed the miracle of healing a great crowd of demons, go and tell many more who then come and say to Jesus *'get out of here.'* **The many, fail to see, understand and accept the truth.** They count only their inconvenience and the loss. They are more interested in the health of their local economy than the witness of this one man who was healed. You can find parallels in our own society today. **Evil exists happily in a crowd, doesn't it?**

Finally, only this healed madman remains. He wants to stay with Jesus but is ordered to remain amongst his own people as a witness of God in his life, like evidence in the passageways of Ta Pinu, to retain the memory of what God had done, for the many others to know and be encouraged. I have no doubt that, in time, the people in that area would return to the question and would choose instead to follow Jesus Christ.

<pause>

Last week was Trinity Sunday, with all it's most-high glory and perfection of God – a wonderful crowd of divine things, so tight we call it oneness. This week we see how the wonders of God are directed towards our very unhealthy human needs and mess – a very different sort of crowd. I have found so very often that the goodness of Jesus Christ is rejected by people, even when the Saviour would do them so much good. **The healing salve of God's Son is effective in so many patterns of the human condition, yet so many chose to remain in their fear because they would rather not have to step away from the crowd, where even collective evil can feel safe to them.** To be the one, the one witness, to step away from the false safety of the crowd is always to transfer oneself into the mercy and protection of God, and to be a witness for the crowds we live amongst.

I wonder what would happen if we hung on the walls of our churches the human evidence of how Jesus has touched our lives? What might we put there in evidence or art? Well, we don't do that here, and it would be very un-British, **but we can still be that same evidence of God on the outside.** Jesus asks you also to remain in the crowd and declare how much God has done for you – let everyone see. Many Christians can tell a story of how Jesus, the gospels and the church, just kept hanging around them until eventually they began to see and understand too. **We are that persistent and faithful evidence across all the ages, of how God addresses our human condition, regardless of all the mess around us.**

Amen