In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My sermon this morning is about the Gerasene demoniac. We read of this poor man in our Gospel Lesson from Luke Chapter 8. The story begins this way:

27And as he [Jesus] stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons; for a long time he had worn no clothes, and he lived not in a house but among the tombs. (Luke 8:27, RSV)

Have you ever wished that you could just blink your eyes and then all the madness would go away? It would be gone away, and you would have a fresh new start in life? So the Gerasene demoniac might have wished. The man was assaulted both within and without. Outside him, his neighbors could no longer tolerate his presence among them, and so he lived on the periphery of the community, among the tombs. His home there among the tombs is a visual demonstration of the desire of the demons. They mean to kill us. Demons simply do not wish us well, however alluring they might seem in the moment. Demon drink, demon lust, demon greed—they all might look pretty good at first, but they drive us on toward death. We might as well start inhabiting the tombs as far as the demons are concerned.

So outside the man there was trouble: his community could no longer abide him and so thrust him to the outskirts.

And within the man there is trouble that might be hard for many of us to imagine. I read a book once by a very fine theologian named Kathryn Greene-McCreight. The book is called Darkness Is My Only Companion¹, and it is theological reflections on the author’s bipolar disorder. When I finished reading the book I remember thinking to myself, “Well, I thought I knew what depression is. But now I see that I did not understand the half of it.”

So it is with this Gerasene demoniac. He suffers in ways that few of us can understand. The disorder in his mind and in his heart is ruining his chance for a happy life. His neighbors had tried to control him by binding him with chains and fetters, but the turmoil within the man was so tremendous that he

¹ https://www.amazon.com/Darkness-My-Only-Companion-Christian-ebook/dp/B00QMSCMPU/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=darkness+is+my+only+companion&qid=1560954724&s=gateway&sr=8-1
simply broke his chains, and he was driven by his demon into the desert, away from the company of people.

But in our story this morning he encounters One of the people – one wonderful Person who can help him. That one Person is the one to whom you belong and to whom you have given your heart, if you be baptized. I am speaking of our Lord and Savior Jesus. The dealings of Jesus with this Gerasene demoniac constitute a promise to you and me that he will heal the turmoil within and around us someday. The Gerasene demoniac had no way of knowing that that particular day would be the day of his salvation. But it was, as if he blinked and all his old madness went away. He met Jesus and was restored to calmness and put in his right mind.

One day this same Jesus is going to land on our shore. He is going to step out of his boat, stride forth until he finds us, and then, as if in a blink of an eye, Jesus is going to solve things and give us a chance for a happy life going forward, indeed going forward forever! Jesus can both calm the storms on the sea and the storms in our souls.

Imagine the situation of the man before Jesus came along, and imagine it afterwards. Before Jesus entered his life, there had been no physician capable of healing the Gerasene demoniac. Modern medicine is wonderful, including modern psychotherapy and psychiatry. But not everybody can afford such treatments, and in any case, they do not always work. Modern doctors and counselors are no sure physicians of body and soul. No one in the village of the Gerasene demoniac had been able to help the man, no matter how wise and experienced the village people were. There had been none to help this man. Father and mother, brother and sister, had probably done the best they could to guide and help the Gerasene demoniac, but their help had not been enough. The man still lived among the tombs, without even enough ability to clothe himself.

So, before Jesus came along, the Gerasene demoniac was cast out, lonely, troubled, probably haunted by thoughts and impulses that do not bother most of us. We know of no skill he had, no trade he practiced. If had been, say, a shoemaker, he could have made shoes there on the perimeter of the community. People could have said, “Well, he’s a strange fellow, but he makes good shoes.” He could have earned some measure of living and had some human contact. But we get no hint of such things in the picture before us. Before Jesus comes along, the man is alone, rejected, a burden on his neighbors.

Ah, but seem him now, once Jesus has come along and touched his life. It is a lovely picture we see of the man. The Bible puts it this way:

35Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone,
sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind... (Luke 8:35, RSV)

This posture of the man, his sitting at the feet of Jesus, is the posture of the disciple. The twelve sat at the feet of Jesus. Mary, the sister of Martha, sat at the feet of Jesus and listen to his teaching. The apostle Paul once sat at the feet of the Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). This is what disciples do, they sit at the feet of the master. So the Gerasene demoniac is no longer a demoniac, but rather a disciple of Jesus. He is in his right mind and he desires henceforth to serve Jesus. Indeed, he wants to go with Jesus. The Bible says that he begs to go with Jesus (Acts 8:38). He has found the savior of his soul and he does not mean to be parted from him.

And truth be told, this man must continue to sit at the feet of Jesus, for the remainder of his life. This man must never be parted from Jesus again, because apart from Jesus, there is chaos of life for him and for us. So, the man longs to go with Jesus, but that is not to be. Jesus has another assignment for him. Jesus wants them to stay in his own town and to bear witness to what God had done for him. Notice that phrase, “... declare how much God has done for you” (Acts 8:39). The man obeys, but in obeying, he speaks of Jesus. Jesus had asked him to speak of God, and the man complies by speaking of the One who has become God for him. He speaks of Jesus. Notice this heartwarming shift in words in the final verse of our Bible story. The man has begged to go with Jesus. Jesus answers him, and then see how the man complies. Jesus says:

39“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. (Acts 8:39, RSV)

Can the man continue to sit at the feet of Jesus even when Jesus gets back into his boat and heads back to Galilee? Can the former Gerasene demoniac continue to be a disciple of Jesus when he is not physically with Jesus anymore? Yes, he can. He now occupies the position that you and I are in, for we are not with Jesus in the same way that Jesus was with the Gerasene demoniac, back when he cast out the legion of demons from the man. But we are still with the same Jesus through our study of the Bible and through our life in the church, for the church is forever the community gathered around Jesus.

As best we can, we should let our discipleship to Jesus lead us away from all chaos in our lives. To the degree that we have any power in the matter, we should use our strength to the utmost to escape any demons that are dragging us down. I mentioned some famous demons earlier in this sermon: demon drink, demon lust, deeming greed. But I bet there are others too. There might
be impulses within us toward power and authority and perhaps even toward dominating other people — we like it! There might be impulses within us toward discrimination, so that we do not treat certain groups in life with fairness. There might be impulses in us toward a kind of excellence that is so demanding that we end up neglecting important people in our lives. Anything that would diminish our lives and the lives of those around us is a demon worth forsaking. It would be better for us to always be found sitting at the feet of Jesus as best we can.

And it might be that a lifetime of struggle against demonic forces in our lives will not bring us perfect peace. We will do the best we can against the forces dragging us down and dragging others down, but we might never achieve perfect victory. We will make things better, and thank God for that, but the entire healing of the chaos in which we are enmeshed might have to wait until Jesus lands on our shore and brings his healing touch to us.

Have you ever wished that you could just blink your eyes and then all the madness would go away? It would be gone away, and you would have a fresh new start in life? Well, such a moment is coming. It is something really good to look forward to. St. Paul speaks of that good moment in 1 Corinthians 15. He says this:

52In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:52, KJV)

We shall be changed, and we shall be changed for the better. Till then, let us make as much progress as we possibly can toward sitting at the feet of Jesus, in our right mind, and eager to serve him, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.