

This is one of those stories about Jesus where one could get caught up in the details. Our rational minds want answers to our questions. Why did Jesus heal some people and not others? Was this an exorcism? Why would Jesus send evil spirits into pigs? What about the people who owned the pigs? Their income was compromised unless they had pig insurance. Since Jews were forbidden under Mosaic law to keep pigs, we could assume they were not Jews. At first the spectators were in awe, but a few minutes later upset and wanted Jesus out of there.

Those caring for the pigs seem to have more concern for the drowned pigs than the insane man wandering around the cemetery. We are told they tried to restrain the mad man with chains. We are not sure about their motivation. Was it out of compassion so the mad man wouldn't hurt himself by cutting himself with sharp stones. Or was it self-preservation. I hate it when my three year old granddaughter screams to get what she wants.

Maybe the towns folk got tired of hearing the screams of a mad man in the hills near their house. Homeless folks tend to make us feel uncomfortable. Today we know that it is not unusual for stressed teens to cut themselves when they feeling suicidal. Was the insane man suicidal?

He was not the kind of guy you wanted to invite to a church potluck. He might come. This scripture raises lots of questions. Let's put our questions aside and look at the bigger picture. If we get too tangled up trying to understand the demons and the pigs we miss the story. What is God trying to say to us today?

Our story begins with Jesus trying to get away from the crowd. He was in Galilee healing and teaching. He is tired and gets into a fishing boat, maybe one of Simon Peter's. On the way to Gentile country there was a terrible storm. You remember the story about the storm. The disciples are terrified and Jesus is asleep in the boat. The disciples wake him asking "Don't you care that we are about to drown." Jesus gets up, calms the storm, and probably goes back to sleep. The external storm has been conquered, but Jesus is soon to be confronted by an internal storm. Maybe there is an internal storm within us all.

Now Jesus is in Gentile territory. Everything is unclean: tombs, spirits, pigs, the territory itself. Jesus has escaped the demanding crowd, and the frightened disciples, but Jesus barely gets out of the boat and a mad man approaches. It is clear that he is out of control and no human efforts have been successful. The mad man does two opposite things. First he knelt down to worship Jesus and then he yelled at Jesus with the words, "What do you have to do with me?" It's an interesting question. "What do you have to do with me, Jesus." It is one of those questions where you need to be careful about asking. It is like a prayer, dangerous sometimes. You might **not** get what you want. Jesus might give you something better.

What I find interesting about this encounter between Jesus and the mad man, is that the even though Jesus has healed hundreds of people and even though Jesus needs rest, Jesus comes to a suffering individual to heal. God cares about as individuals. Even discouraged individuals, even those acting out, even those screaming in difficult circumstances. God **doesn't** care if we act a little crazy sometimes. God **does** care about us as individuals even if sometimes we feel like the walking dead.

Jesus cured the man even before the man asked for healing. Actually he never asked to be healed. Instead he asks the question, "What do you have to do with me?" The man doesn't ask to be cured. Maybe he was incapable of asking for help. He describes himself as having a legion of evil inside him. A legion is a major unit in the Roman army. It consisted of four to six thousand men. In other words, the mad man had lots of issues. Mental illness impacted not just one part of his life, but all of it.

Homelessness and drug usage are more prevalent than ever before. We have seen lots of homeless in Seattle, but now the problem is also in Sequim. We don't know what to do about it. Since we have closed our hospitals for the mentally ill, those persons now live on the street. It is a complex issue not easily solved. The result is self-destructive and society disruption. Many mentally ill are also drug users. Some steal to support their drug habit. Some refuse to go to a shelter. Some feel too confined there. Others don't want to follow the rules of shelters and want to continue doing what they want.

I would make a terrible homeless person. Where would I go if it was raining, snowing, or too hot outside? Where would I go to the bathroom? An important consideration now that I am older. Some homeless feel they have no choice. Next week my daughter and husband and four children will be evicted, homeless, because they can't afford the rent. Yes, they made the choice of getting into that mess by renting a 2,000 a month apartment that they couldn't afford. Now what?

Jesus healed. How can we be a healing agent in this world? Jesus asked the walking dead man his name. When we name something we can often deal better with it. It is like going to the doctor and waiting for test results. Once we know the name of what's wrong it helps us cope. Naming gives power and maybe even some control.

Once healed, the mad man wants to go with Jesus and tell everyone what Jesus has done for him. Jesus told him to stay home and let people in his community know what God has done for him. Sometimes it is harder to talk to family and friends about God's love than to strangers. Acceptance of new ideas isn't easy.

I am one of those persons who had a hard time giving up my flip phone. Perhaps that was hard for you too. Maybe some of you still have a flip phone. I now have an I-Phone 6. It comes with all those little symbols on it called OMG's. They say a picture is worth a thousand words. My granddaughter, age 10, knows how to go on web and find even more OMG to send me. Last week my six year old granddaughter came out of her room with a T-shirt on that said in bold letters, OMG a symbol for Oh My God.

I was thinking of another way to interpret the letters OMG; not as pictures, but as an invitation to pray. Sometimes when someone is surprised they might cry out with the words, "Oh My God. I have encouraged my grandchildren to say, "O My Gosh, instead of "O My God." Perhaps it is the way they say it that annoys me.

Oh My God, would make a nice beginning to a prayer. We could finish the sentence with whatever things we are worried about. Our prayer might sound like this. **O My God** I am worried about what will happen

in our church when Pastor Russ comes. He won't be Jack. He won't be Beth. I don't like change. **Amen.** Or maybe this prayer, **O My God**, I am still angry at Jack for leaving us. I am angry about the changes here. Things are not the way I think they should be. **Amen.**

I am sure you can create your own OMG prayers. We can pray about the crazy stuff in our life. We can pray about the crazy people in our life. The OMG prayers are honest prayers. After we pray those prayers we can wait and see what will happen. Like the mad man, things might not turn out the way I wish or think they should. Instead things might work out better than we never expected. Jesus is a liberator. He frees us from all the stuff that holds us back. Jesus frees us to try new things without having to worry about success or failure.

What does Jesus want from you and me?
a better life
a happier life
a better church
a happier church
freedom to be who we are
freedom to allow the spirit to work in us.

God is mystery and asks us to continue struggling to believe even though we don't understand. Jesus heals both crowds and individuals. We don't have to go to Africa to share our faith. We can begin our prayer with an OMG, "O My God, " and let the spirit lead us. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Earliest gospel, purpose portrait of J to Gentile Christians in Rome.
Use miracle story as proof of Jesus' messiahship.
