

Be Careful What You Ask For
Luke 8:26-39

Be careful what you ask for or wish for ... is a phrase I have heard all my life. And the older I get the more meaning this phrase has. For the rest of the phrase is ... be careful what you ask for because you might just get it. And the reality is that the desire to acquire something is often better than actually having that thing. And sometimes there are unpleasant consequences to receiving what we desire. An example might be wanting a dog and going through a lot of trouble to get a dog and then discovering that having a dog can be costly in veterinarian bills, and the said dog wakes you up in the middle of the night to go outside to potty and play! It is like having a baby in your house again! Many would say it is worth it but the reality is always a little different than we think it will be!

That reality is seen in our passage today. For the demons, the people and the man who was healed all ask specific things of Jesus thinking what they ask for is in their best interest and yet what they receive from Jesus is very different than what they expected.

The story of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac is found in all three of the synoptic gospels. In Luke it is the only healing that takes place in Gentile territory. Jesus and the disciples crossed the sea of Galilee in their boat. As a matter of fact just before this story a storm had raged on the sea and the disciples had woken Jesus seeking help. Jesus had calmed the storm and rebuked the disciples saying *“Where is your faith?”* The disciples were afraid and asked one another *“Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?”*

They get to the other side of the lake - into Gentile territory and discover that Jesus not only commands the winds and the water but he also has power over demons. Just as Jesus steps on the land *“a man of the city who had demons met him.”* Jesus immediately assessed the situation and commanded the demons to come out of the man. The demons speak to Jesus. At first we think it is the

man but we quickly realize it was the demons that possessed him that dialogue with Jesus. Just as sometimes when we are dealing with an alcoholic or a drug addict or a schizophrenic we realize that it is the alcohol, drugs or the other personality speaking when we are talking with them. The description of the demons that possessed this man clearly reveal the extent of their possession of him. He had run around naked and crazy until the people of the community had chained him to the walls of a tomb “to protect him” and them.

These demons recognize Jesus - they know who he is. They fall down before him - in awe or fear or both - and bellow “*What business do you have messing with me? You’re Jesus, Son of the Most High God, but don’t give me a hard time!*” In other words - leave us alone! We know who you are but we don’t want any part of you! They ask to be left to continue to torment this man. And of course Jesus cannot allow that.

Jesus calmly asked him “*What is your name?*” They reply “*Legion*” for the demons were many. A Roman legion in the time of Jesus consisted of 6,000 men. That is a whole lot of demons! But the first step in confronting any situation is being able to name it - to identify it. And Jesus knew that. And now he knew it’s name.

A Catholic nun tells about the time she came home from the grocery in Detroit, Michigan. Her apartment was in a rather rundown part of the city. As she was getting her groceries out of her car, this tiny, tiny, lady looked up and saw a gang of rough rogues headed toward her with what she felt was the intention to steal her groceries and make off with them. As they approached her, she looked them in the eye, and in a strong, confident voice, said, "Now, Tyrone, help me up the steps with these groceries!"

One of the boys replied, "How did you know my name is Tyrone?" The nun exclaimed, "Ah, everyone in Detroit knows who you are. Now you and your friends help me up the stairs with these groceries!" which they did instantly.

When the nun was asked how she knew that the boy's name was Tyrone, she laughed and replied, "With that many boys on the streets of Detroit, I just knew that one of them had to be a 'Tyrone.' " Just by saying that name, she cast out her fear and their hatred. Knowing someone's name has power. (<https://sermons.com/sermon/what-happens-when-you-re-not-prepared-for-what-happens/1373359>)

The demons decided they would negotiate with Jesus for they seemed to realize that they were going to be cast out of the man. So they asked - actually begged Jesus - to just transfer them into a large herd of pigs on the hillside. They obviously thought that would be a better life. Only they didn't realize what their presence would do to the pigs - it made them crazy and they rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. The result was the same regardless of who they possessed. Be careful what you ask for....

The pig herders - those tending the pigs - ran off - and told others what had happened. That drew a crowd of people to the lakeside to see what had happened and to see this Jesus who had made it happen. What they discovered was the man who had been possessed fully clothed, looking normal and sitting at the feet of Jesus. They were afraid. Wouldn't you be? The day before this man was crazed - running around naked and needing chains. How could you be sure he wasn't going to turn back into that person any minute?

People who have family members or loved ones who are alcoholics or drug addicts or who have a mental illness understand this wariness. You are always on the alert wondering when the disease will strike again and the one who you were afraid of will appear instead of the one you love. When confronted with a radical change these people couldn't cope with that change. It was too much, too fast and they were scared out of their minds. Is it any wonder that they ask Jesus to leave? And Jesus did but Jesus didn't take the man with him...getting rid of Jesus didn't remove the one they were afraid of.... Be careful what you ask for....

And that brings us to the man who was healed. He asked Jesus - no begged Jesus - to go with

him. He may have been afraid of the people and what they would do to him since they were so afraid of him. He may have realized that is what the people hoped he would do. Or he may have just wanted to rest in the presence of the one who had changed him. We understand that don't we. He had found peace being with Jesus. But be careful what you ask for.... for Jesus had other ideas about what this man needed to do. And how could he refuse to do as Jesus asked? Jesus told him to *"return to your home and declare how much God has done for you."* Go among the people - your people - the very people who wanted him sent away and tell your story. Be a witness to what God has done for you.

In the world of recovery we know the power of this command. For in AA and Narc-a-Non and all the twelve step programs the first step is to state your name, to identify your addiction and to tell your story. For once you tell your story you can begin the process of working your way through the twelve steps. The twelve steps begin with these three:

1. We admitted we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him.

Alcoholism is a terrible problem in the former Soviet Union. Before the collapse of the USSR, Soviet officials appealed to American AA members to help them set up AA groups. However, because the Soviet Union was officially atheistic, they asked that these first three steps be omitted in adapting AA to them. The Americans refused, stating that those three steps are basic to their program. We need God to free us from our demons. (https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1719)

Members of AA also realize they not only need God's help but the support of people around them. Jesus knew that also. For the man who had been healed to truly heal he needed his family and friends again. He needed the community to support him. And so Jesus sent him home to tell his story.

Into the community that hopefully would accept him, nurture him, and support him. He needed to face the very people who had chained him to protect him and themselves for the story he had to tell had the power to also change them.

Be careful what you ask for ... for you just might get it. And what we learn quickly as Christians - what the man who was healed learned - was that when God responds much is demanded of us. And it begins with our sharing our stories. For ten months now a group of members of Covenant have been involved in a process of reflecting on the world around us and how we can tell our story more powerfully to the community. We entered the process seeking help with evangelism for we were concerned about the changes we have seen in our faith community and in the community around us. What we have discovered is that the world around us has changed drastically and we as a church, if we are to survive in the 21st century, must also make some changes. We realize that many here would like to just keep things the way they are - we might even say many of us are like the people who begged Jesus to leave for friends, what Jesus demands of us is not easy. It will take us out of our comfort zone - push us into the community and not allow us to just sit at Jesus' feet and worship him. Much as Jesus' message took the disciples out of their comfort zone following Pentecost and sent them into a world that often responded with persecution.

But the more time we spend in this process, the more we as a group keep coming to the realization that we have a story to tell that others need to hear. It is the story of how God through the life of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit is alive and well in the world around us. A story that has the power to spread the love of God into places that desperately need to experience the good news. And we are the ones who need to tell our stories so that the world will come to understand that our hope is in a relationship with God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Each one of us here have a story to tell of what God has done in our lives. Our stories may not be dramatic but they are powerful. They are the stories of how God sustained us and surrounded us

with love and care when a loved one died. How God walked with us through a tragedy or an illness. How God gave us strength to make difficult decisions that changed the course of our lives. How God was with us in the foxholes and brought us home when our buddies died around us. How God provided a community to help us by providing meals and help with small tasks we couldn't do ourselves when we were incapacitated. How God answered our prayers and opened doors that gave us hope when all else had failed.

Friends, we have a story to tell and our stories of what God has done in and through our lives are what will transform the church of Jesus Christ. We need to share our stories. We need to talk about our faith and our doubts, our fears and our hopes and our relationship with Jesus Christ. We need to believe that our stories have power to offer grace to others for Jesus offers forgiveness to all. We never know when what we have been through can make a difference for someone else.

I was recently talking with someone who had tried to commit suicide as a young adult and had come through that ordeal to become a stronger more faithful person. That person was given an opportunity to share their story with a group of young people - a story they had not shared with many people. But the opportunity presented itself and it was a story the group needed to hear for one of their group had just tried to commit suicide. And it was a story that this individual needed to tell for it was pivotal in their faith journey. It had made them who they are today. For friends, sometimes God redeems our story by surrounding us with people who need to hear about our past, so it doesn't become their future. And we have the power to help by sharing our story - the good and the bad, the beautiful and the difficult parts.

As a community we have been asking and praying for God's guidance. God seems to be telling us to go and tell everything God has done in and through us. To go into the community and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. The question is - Will we do as God commands? Will we go and tell the world everything God has done in and through our lives?