

SUNDAY Gospel of the Unseen

Scripture: Luke 8:26-39 (selected portions)

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on 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”— for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man ... 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 ... Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes 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.

MONDAY Luke 8:22-56 The power to calm all storms

The Sea of Galilee sat in a kind of geologic “bowl,” and was always subject to sudden, severe storms. Jesus calmed one of them and amazed his disciples. Yet he showed a different, even greater kind of power as he calmed the inner storms of an unstable man, healed a woman ailing for 12 years and gave life and hope back to a synagogue leader and his deathly ill child.

- Archaeologists found a boat from Jesus’ time in mud at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee (To learn more, visit www.jesusboat.com/boat.php.) Such a small boat, with only a sail or oars for power, must have seemed terribly inadequate to deal with a violent storm. What “storms” are you facing for which your human resources seem inadequate? How can you open yourself to Jesus’ power and love, letting him help bring you peace as you face those storms?
- Whether facing a violent, disturbed outcast, an influential yet frantic synagogue ruler, or a “smothering” crowd in which one fearful invalid had touched him in faith, Jesus maintained his calm self-possession. What enabled Jesus to resist fear in situations that triggered it in most people? Do you believe his quiet confidence created a more supportive, safe environment for others to change their lives for the better?

Prayer: Lord God, what I want, almost always, is for your power to quiet the storms outside of me. Give me a deeper appreciation of the love and power with which you often quiet the storm inside me instead. Amen.

TUESDAY Luke 9:1-27 The King who came to give

Jesus sent the 12 out for what we might almost see as “serving practice.” He then had them help him feed 5,000 people. In answer to Jesus’ penetrating question, Peter said Jesus was the Christ (Greek for “anointed one”—equivalent to the Hebrew *Messiah*). Jesus did not dispute the identification—but he did say frankly that being the Christ meant suffering, not earthly power. And it meant that, not just for him, but for those who chose to follow him, too.

- The disciples had a prudent idea: “Send the crowd away so that they can go to the nearby villages and countryside and find lodging and food.” Jesus jolted them by replying, “YOU give them something to eat” (9:13). How did the story (cf. verse 16) show Jesus’ power flowing through people, rather than just directly meeting people’s needs? Does he still call us to be vehicles through whom his power flows? How did the story show our need to rely on Jesus’ power, not our own, to achieve God’s purposes?
- In what ways have you had to answer Jesus’ question: “What advantage do people have if they gain the whole world for themselves yet perish or lose their lives?” (verse 25) What choice(s) do you face that promise gain, yet might cost you your values, self-respect or honor? In what ways can you gain the strength and self-knowledge to make the right choices?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, even in our tolerant country, when we serve as you served, and stand firm for God’s principles as you did, it can feel like suffering. Give me a heart that’s always oriented to your ways, even when under pressure. Amen.

WEDNESDAY Luke 9:28-50 What does true greatness look like?

Moses, Elijah, a flash of light, God’s voice—THAT looked like greatness to human eyes. For Peter, John and James, seeing the greatness and glory of Jesus was so overwhelming it left them speechless. But true greatness in God’s kingdom wasn’t on a mountaintop. When they came down from that experience, Jesus defined greatness as having childlike trust in God, healing the sick and broken, serving people’s needs, and even suffering at human hands.

- The drama of the scene was stunning: Jesus’ face and clothes flashed like lightning, Moses and Elijah appeared, and God’s presence manifested in a cloud overshadowed Peter, John and James. In the midst of it all, God’s voice said of Jesus, “This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him!” Here’s a straightforward question for you to ponder: what does it mean for you to listen to Jesus? Are you willing to do it?
- Peter, John, and James probably expected Jesus to descend the mountain, call in the cavalry, and drive out the Roman oppressors! They couldn’t yet grasp that greatness in God’s kingdom often looks very different from the world’s idea of greatness. True greatness, as Jesus lived it, involved serving others, trusting God as a child would and saving the world by giving himself. How do you define greatness? In what specific ways do greatness according to God and greatness according to the world differ?

Prayer: King Jesus, thank you for showing me what true greatness looks like. Help me to seek a greatness based on your example of faith, serving, and even the willingness to suffer for the sake of others. Amen.

THURSDAY Luke 9:51-10:24 “He determined to go to Jerusalem”

From Luke 9:51 on, Jesus was purposefully going to Jerusalem. (He arrived there in Luke 19:28, on Palm Sunday.) Like the gospel of John, Luke wanted it to be clear that Jesus was not a victim who stumbled unknowingly into hostile Jerusalem (cf. John 10:17-18). Luke framed every event from 9:51 on in this light: Jesus was going to Jerusalem, where the cross awaited. Yet Satan was falling. This was a march to victory, not defeat.

- Jesus had a vital talk with the seventy-two (or seventy—ancient copies of Luke differ on this minor point) after their mission ended. They were thrilled with their outward, visible success, but Jesus re-directed their thoughts. In verse 10:20, how did he turn their eyes to the true basis for Christian joy and confidence, regardless of outward appearances?
- Some people find 9:57-62 (like Luke 8:19-21) troubling. Was Jesus opposed to family love and loyalty? No (cf., for example, Luke 2:51-52). He used hyperbolic language to get people (including us) to check our priorities. Has loyalty to family, company, school or anything else ever tugged you in a different direction than your loyalty to God? If that ever happens in the future, which loyalty will you choose?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you knew where you were going, and you knew why. Give me an inner compass that discerns the key directions and movements of the course you are calling me to follow with my life. Amen.

FRIDAY Luke 10:25-11:13 Parables, priorities and prayer

Part of what it meant for Jesus to “determine to go to Jerusalem” was the growing presence of legal experts and Pharisees testing him with questions that sought to trap him. He answered this one with a story showing in vivid human terms what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. He told his friend Martha it was vital to make him her first priority, and he taught his disciples how to pray—and why.

- The Samaritan in the story didn’t just offer casual roadside help. He put the injured man on “his own donkey” (meaning he walked), brought him to an inn, cared for him, paid two days wages and offered to pay more on his return if needed. How did Jesus’ description of the Samaritan reflect God’s vast generosity to us? How can knowing we’ve received God’s generosity move us to be generous to our neighbors in ways we never would achieve out of our own goodness?
- After teaching them the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus gave his disciples an insight into “answered prayer” (Luke 11:11-13). He compared the “good gifts” parents give their children with God’s gift of the Holy Spirit to all who ask. But, of course, often we’re not asking for the Holy Spirit. What things are you praying for today? If God answers by giving you the Holy Spirit’s presence, will you thank God for that or be upset that you didn’t receive the other thing you asked for?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the bread I need for today. And give me your presence, too, because, in the words of the song, “you are my daily bread.” Amen.

SATURDAY Luke 11:14-54 Confronting the self-righteous

People convinced that they were upright slandered Jesus—for setting people free from conditions caused by evil! Yet they fixated on washing for ritual purity (not for hygiene—remember, no one knew about germs in their day). Jesus strongly disputed their sense that outward rituals matter more than inner candor and openness. He was kind, but not a doormat, and he bluntly challenged their claims to have a corner on righteousness.

- Sometimes our efforts to “clean up our life” don’t work out, Jesus said in verses 24-26. It doesn’t help much just to clear out the bad, to give up hurtful habits. What are some positive ways you have learned to allow God to fill your soul with divine purpose and love? Verses 34-35 urged us to examine how well our eyes—not just physical, but spiritual—are working. Jesus’ enemies blinded themselves spiritually by refusing to consider any evidence that didn’t fit what they wanted to be true. In what ways has God brought new light to your mind, to your ways of thinking, over the last year?

Prayer: Lord God, open the eyes of my heart. Let me soak in the light of your love and grace, so that it may beam out of me to lighten the lives of all who come in contact with me. Amen.

Family Activity: Gather your family into the darkest space of your home. A closet or a dark bathroom would be good options. Bring a Bible and a very small reading light with you. When you are all together, ask someone to read Luke 10:17-20. Describe how just as life can be dark at times, so are our hearts, lives and the world without the light of Jesus. In an age-appropriate way, discuss some of the evil in the world and how it makes us feel. Then share how as followers of Jesus, his light lives within us and he wants us to share it with the world! Open the door of the room, celebrate and be thankful for the light of Jesus! Commit to sharing the light of Jesus with all people.

This study was adapted from The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection.