

Healed – inside and out

Luke 8.26-39

Jesus and the disciples encounter a man who was said to be 'possessed by demons'. The man provoked fear and misunderstanding in the onlookers, but Jesus transformed him and enabled him to participate in society again.

Now read **Luke 8.26-39** see p.2 for text.

A note on the passage

In Jesus' time, and also sometimes today, mental illness and disability were misunderstood and 'demonised'. Jesus leads by example; he shows that there is nothing to be afraid of. He extends his love to the one who suffers, showing how care and understanding can change the lives of others.



How might we offer God's healing to those who are in pain – physically, mentally or emotionally?



A personal experience: 'I was once asked to complete a placement as part of some training. The placement was a group for adults with learning disabilities. I confess to being apprehensive. At first, I was rather alarmed when a group member called out unpredictably, or touched and held me. But, gradually, I came to know them as all individuals and not just as 'those people'. And, eventually, I realised that I had begun to love them. They offered me something I hadn't often encountered in life: trust and unconditional love. We had a lot of fun together and they became some of my best friends. Love turned fear into friendship and pity into joy.'

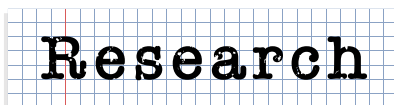
Can you recall times when you have put fears and prejudice to one side in order to help others? Welcoming others is an important focus this week as we remember the Windrush Generation on 22 June. Those people often met with rejection and hostility, and some suffer the consequences to this day. How can the example of Jesus help us when we feel challenged to welcome someone with love?



To help support your own mental health, prepare a collage of people and things that are important to you and give you joy. This could be a conventional collage of photographs and images, or a display or collection of objects. There may be precious memories attached to them which bring back memories of good times. Alternatively, you could commit to posting a photo of something precious on social media every day and encourage others to do the same, explaining why. Give thanks for good memories and present-day happy times.



Offer to help out at a group which supports those who are often marginalised in society. For example, there may be a local dementia café, or a refugee support group. If you can't help in person, could you consider making a donation of goods or money? Look out for charity shops such as Mind or Age UK and find out what they need or how you could support them.



Use the internet to learn more about mental illnesses such as depression, bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia. Consider how this knowledge might help you to be more tolerant or understanding in future, or perhaps offer help in some way.



Watch the film *It's a Wonderful Life* (usually available on streaming platforms). Ponder its message that, without your life, some good things may not have happened in the world. Try to recall some ways in which your life has made an impact – e.g. on family, friends, your workplace, social groups, church. If you struggle with this, think instead about the people who help you and influence you for good. A wonderful life is not just for Christmas!



Use this prayer every day this week:

Teach me, O Lord, to see myself as you see me – valued, loved and necessary in your plan for the world. When I feel down, lift me up with the remembrance of good times and happy days; and give me hope that these will come again. When I feel strong, help me to lend my strength to those who suffer in body, mind or spirit. Teach me to see others as you see them, granting me compassion towards those who are marginalised and rejected. Help me to strive for a world where everyone is accepted and nurtured. In Jesus' name. Amen.

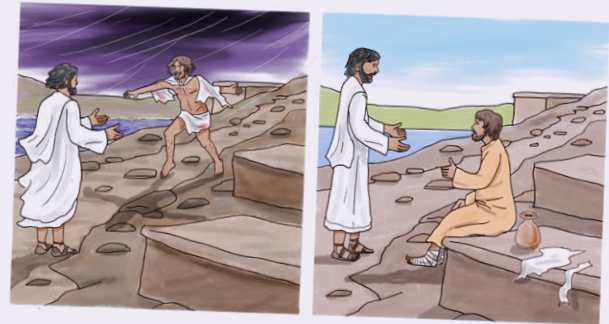
Choose a version of the passage to read. The first is the ROOTS version for children, the second is the NRSV text which may be suitable for older children, young people and adults.

The man was a strange sight. He was kept chained up in the tombs, with guards to watch over him, and he wore...well, he wore nothing at all! He was frightening. He would break loose and run, driven by the many demons inside him. That's how the man first met Jesus, when he arrived by boat in the country of the Gerasenes; the man was naked and running free.

The man said something strange when he met Jesus: 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.' But it wasn't really him talking. It was the demons or unclean spirit inside him, which Jesus had commanded to come out.

'What is your name?' asked Jesus, and the many demons all inside him replied, 'Legion.' Then the demons made a strange request. 'Don't send us to hell,' they begged Jesus. 'Send us into that herd of pigs instead.'

'You have my permission,' Jesus said, and the demons left the man and went into the pigs.



The pigs felt very strange with demons inside them! They charged, oinking and squealing, down the hill and into the Sea of Galilee where they drowned.

When the people heard that the man from the tombs had been healed, they came to have a look. Seeing him, sensible and fully clothed, they were amazed and afraid. They asked Jesus to leave. When the cured man begged to go with him, Jesus said, 'Return home and tell people how much God has done for you.'

Luke 8.26-39

Did you know?

- 'Demons' in this context means the spiritual forces that trouble people. Discuss how the man's behaviour made people think he was possessed. Today we would probably offer support to the man, potentially for mental health problems.
- 'Legion' was the name for a large unit of Roman soldiers (in the thousands) and so means a very large number.

Luke 8.26-39 (NRSV)

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. (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 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.