

“Being Seen”

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²⁶ Then they arrived at the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ As he stepped out on shore, a man from the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had not worn any clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, shouting, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me,” ²⁹ 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.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. ³¹ They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. ³² 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. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd stampeded down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. ³⁴ When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ 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 became frightened. ³⁶ Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷ Then the whole throng of people of the surrounding region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone out begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ “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.

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I want to begin this morning by acknowledging a truth that's important as we read today's gospel story: the medical, psychological, and scientific knowledge available during the time of the New Testament has been far surpassed in our day. When we read stories like this one—about demons causing erratic behavior or violent outbursts—we do so through the lens of our modern understanding of mental and behavioral health. We no longer interpret seizures or severe emotional distress as signs of demonic possession. We no longer treat them by calling clergy to perform an exorcism—nor should we. But recognizing that shouldn't diminish the power of this story. Because this *is* a powerful—and frankly, scary—story.

The episode of Jesus and the Gerasene demoniac reads more like a scene from a horror film. Think *The Conjuring*, where a couple is called to cast out an evil presence tormenting someone's life. In today's gospel, Jesus arrives not at a comfortable home, but in a graveyard—where a man lives among the tombs, naked and tormented by something deep and sinister within him.

This man has been bound with chains again and again, and each time, those chains are broken. Something inside him—a legion of something—keeps driving him further into isolation, further into the wilderness. When Jesus meets him, the demons cry out in fear, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” They beg Jesus not to cast them into the abyss, and instead, Jesus sends them into a herd of pigs nearby. The pigs rush down a steep bank into the lake and drown.

Can you imagine watching that scene unfold? Imagine being a swineherd witnessing your entire livelihood plunge into the sea. Imagine being a townspeople hearing about a stranger who commands demons and sends pigs to their death. Imagine being one of Jesus' disciples, realizing that your teacher holds power even over unseen, destructive forces. And imagine being the man—once naked, fierce, and feared—now clothed, quiet, and sitting at Jesus' feet, completely transformed. It's a terrifying and awe-filled moment.

But you may be wondering what this ancient, unsettling story has to do with us—here, today, in the 21st century at New England Congregational Church?

Well, in this story, we see Jesus embodying one of the essential callings of the church in any era: the calling to see people. Truly see them.

Jesus came proclaiming good news for the poor, release for the captive, healing for the sick, and freedom for the oppressed. He preached radical love and practiced radical inclusion. And for the man in this story, that good news began not with a sermon or a miracle—but with being *seen*.

Jesus didn't see a naked madman living among the dead. He saw a person. He saw through the layers of torment and stigma, beyond the fear and the labels, and into the core of who that man truly was. And in that moment of deep seeing—of holy recognition—a healing began. Together, they confronted the man's inner torment, and empowered him to step back into life, into dignity, into community. That's what the church is called to do. That's what *we* are called to do.

“Seeing” people isn't just about noticing who's in the room. The kind of seeing we're talking about here doesn't even require physical eyes. It's about attention, presence, empathy. It's about understanding someone as they are—where they are—without judgment or agenda. Psychologists call this *unconditional positive regard*: the belief in the inherent dignity and worth of every person, and in their capacity for growth and goodness. But the truth is, this kind of seeing doesn't always happen.

One writer described the experience of being unseen this way:

You walk right by me without a word.
Don't you see me?

My heart is broken. My life in chaos. My [partner] is having an affair.
Can you see me?

My [spouse] lost [their] job. We can't pay the bills. We might lose our home.
Can you see me?

I just got out of prison. I have nowhere to go. I want to change.
Can you help me?

I am depressed. I don't want to live anymore.
Does anyone see me?

I live on the street. I'm tired. I want out of this life, but don't know how.
Can you help me?

I am weary and frustrated. Is there more to life?
Could you tell me?¹

When was the last time *you* didn't feel seen? Maybe it was at a social event, a family gathering, a doctor's office—or even here, in church.

We all have that deep, sacred longing: to be seen for who we are. To be known—not for our job titles or our struggles, our mistakes or our successes—but for who we are at our core. We long to be known beyond the surface. Beyond the masks. Beyond the judgments.

Jesus *saw* the man in the tombs. He saw the divine spark within him. He helped him battle his inner demons, restoring him to himself and to his community. He reminded him that he belonged.

At New England Church, we say we are a community. And we mean it. But real community starts here—with *seeing* and *being seen*. With knowing and being known. With treating each person as beloved, sacred, and worthy of dignity. We cannot be the church we're called to be—or minister to the people we're called to love—unless we learn to see others (all others) like Jesus.

May we have the eyes to see. And may we be the kind of church where no one goes unnoticed, where every person finds dignity, healing, and belonging. May it be so with us. Amen.

¹ Sharon Brobst. "Does Anyone See Me?" SharonBrobst.com, June 11, 2011:
<https://www.sharonbrobst.com/2011/06/can-you-see-me.html>.