

**A Father's Guilt Luke 8:26-39**  
**Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV**

5th Sunday after Pentecost/Father's Day (June 19) 2016

<sup>26</sup> Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.<sup>27</sup> When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.<sup>28</sup> When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me."<sup>29</sup> For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time 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 desert.)<sup>30</sup> Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him.<sup>31</sup> And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.<sup>32</sup> Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission.<sup>33</sup> Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

<sup>34</sup> When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country.<sup>35</sup> Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and 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.<sup>36</sup> And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed.<sup>37</sup> Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned.<sup>38</sup> The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying,<sup>39</sup> "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

Jonathan was only ten years old when his father died. It had come on him suddenly one day. He had felt sick to his stomach and took to bed. Within three hours he was gone.

Jonathan never understood how nor why this had happened. But suddenly he and his mother were left alone. It would be several years before his mother would die and leave him all alone. But he felt alone from the age of ten.

[He tried to learn how to be a man by going to war.](#) But that did no good.

He was trained but never seemed to "get" what his fellows did. They say that once in battle you no longer fight for country nor ideals, but for the protection of yourself and your buddies around you. It didn't seem like anyone around Jonathan cared enough about him to really matter. He always just seemed alone. And the killing – it was just something that he did. He didn't feel much one way or the other. It didn't make him feel good. It didn't make him feel bad. He just felt alone.

**He tried marriage.** She was pretty and smart and kind. But, she wasn't able to bring him out of his a-lone-ness, even when they were intimate.

**They had a baby** – a little baby girl. She was beautiful. ***She threatened to bring Jonathan out of his solitary state. And that threat was too much for him to handle.*** He felt very strange – being threatened with ***love*** and ***beauty*** and ***intimacy***. It was too much. He left them both when his daughter was only two months into this world.

Jonathan wandered then for awhile – looking for something to bring him, if not happiness, at least something to stop the gnawing in the belly of his soul. But now – now since he left the one thing that threatened to give him satisfaction: “fatherhood” – now he also felt ***guilt on top of his emptiness***. The one thing that might have saved him, frightened him too much to receive.

The love he lost with his father's death seemed to be a hole he was afraid to have filled.

And so he wandered. He had troubles with commitments of any kind. People tried to rely upon him for many things, but he always managed to let them down – almost like he was programmed to fail. He began to frighten people. His emptiness and fear of commitment began to live itself out in scary ways.

Finally, they locked him up – for the safety of himself and of others. He needed to be contained.

And then, we are told in today's Gospel lesson, Jesus came along. And Jesus saw Jonathan differently. And Jesus freed Jonathan from ***all of the demons within*** and ***all the chains without***, that had kept him bound. And they were many!

Later on, as Saint John's Gospel remembers – when He was telling His disciples about His death and departure, Jesus said: ***“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”***

## **ALL** people.

There were some folks – and they were mostly the “good folks” – the moral folks, the people who have been injured by the man they tried to keep bound up – who asked Jesus to please leave them. They liked things better, in their neat, straight, moral pictures. Jesus upset all of that (and besides that, He killed a bunch of pigs!)

There are some folks – and they are mostly the “good folks” – the moral folks, the people who have been injured, who don’t want to believe that Jesus meant what He said...that when He was crucified, He would draw ALL people unto Himself. They insisted that those people had to go to hell, irrespective of what Jesus said.

In the end of that story – as in life – many of the neat little boxes and labels get all messed up, just like Mary had predicted:

***“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. ... he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;....”*** (Luke 1:46-47a, 52)

Jonathan, for reasons that psychologists try to explain, was all tied up –

- in resistance to life,
- in self-judgment, guilt, and self-loathing, and
- with labels.

Jesus came along and He saw Jonathan differently. Jesus

- had a reverence for all life;
- saw beauty in everything; and
- just could not help Himself: He saw Jonathan through the eyes of love.

And after the encounter with Jesus,

- Jonathan’s resistance was replaced with reverence;
- his self-judgment was replaced with beauty; and
- his labels were replaced by love.

And it set him free.

Today, we are gathered here, in celebration of the extraordinary power of God to save the lost, and to unbind those whose chains have been strong.

God's grace is powerful enough to heal all wounds, even those imposed over a lifetime.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.