

## Deviled Ham

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the one who makes us whole, Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.

I know most of you have heard the old joke about this story of Jesus sending the demons into a herd of pigs—history’s first recorded recipe for “Deviled Ham”... (SLIDE) Sorry, I just couldn’t resist... I had to start off with a joke because this sermon topic is so deadly serious. Who, in this room, or worshipping with us online lives without pain? I’m not just talking about physical pain, although I would never discount your physical pain, I want us to think deeper about the pain of suffering. There are all kinds of pain other than the kind where I hit my thumb with a hammer. So many of us suffer in silence with the sorrow, grief, and loneliness we carry around each and every day. (SLIDE)

In our scripture reading for today Mark provides us with the perfect description of a demoniac. He lived among the dead, which means he was a social outcast. No one would want to associate with him. He was tormented. He regularly broke chains. He howled to express his pain and suffering. He was filled with self-loathing so much that he bruised himself with stones. Other people could not restrain him. He was a threat to himself, to others and, to society. The man pictured in this story by Mark is a combination of all the pain and suffering every one has experienced at some time. Since he was suffering from a combination of

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everything that plagues humanity, we can all find something in this demon possessed man we can identify with.

When we look at each other we see people who appear on the surface to be fairly well put together, but when we look in the mirror we can't hide the pain we carry. When we first moved here from Alaska we lived about four or five houses down the street from another family that also attended our Church in Fairborn. The dad was a Lieutenant Colonel, the mom a nurse. We had a lot in common. More than we realized at first. PJ and I both assumed this family had everything we thought was ideal. By this time, I already knew I would never make Lt Colonel, but still, Kevin and I became good friends. At the same time, PJ and Lynn were both nurses and also became good friends. They had two children a boy and a girl. In school, their kids seemed to have it all together. I think it's safe to say we envied them because they seemed to have such a perfect life. I'm so happy God put Kevin and Lynn in our lives. I've learned so much about not judging people from them. When we got to know them, I discovered there was so much more beneath the surface. What appeared to be the ideal family, we soon learned was just a façade covering as much pain and sorrow as we, or any other family I knew at the time. I don't think Kevin and Lynn or Mel and PJ are too much different than most or all other families. We all struggle with some type of brokenness, pain, or sorrow. The only difference between our families today and

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this man in our scripture lesson is we do a lot better at covering up our brokenness. The demon possessed man who was forced to live in the cemetery couldn't cover up his brokenness. We gloss over our deep angst and cover up everything that might even give the appearance of a problem, but we're just as demonized as this tomb dwelling man. The difference is most of us are still smiling on the outside.

The man in our text for today was not only an outcast, but he was also a threat to others. He had done things to break the relationships he had with family and friends. There's great guilt in the way we seem to most often hurt the ones we love the most. We all need forgiveness and healing. No one escapes the torments of life. We're tormented by memories. We're enslaved by secrets. We're driven by fears that we are so bad, we've come to believe we're unlovable—not even God can or will love us. The truth is, we *are* that bad. Not one of us in this room is untouched by the stench of Sin. The good news is that Jesus comes directly into the tombs where we suffer and none of us is beyond the healing touch of our Savior, Jesus Christ. God is in our healing whether it's physical, emotional, social, or psychological. Jesus responds to our need. In our Bible text, he demon sought Jesus out. It's a fact of the healing process that we must admit our need to God in order for God to minister to us at the place of our need and to heal us. That's why we begin almost every Worship service with the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness. Before we open ourselves up to pray; before we hear God's Word in

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scripture, song, or sermon; and before we receive God's Blessing, we first confess our sin and our sinful nature to God and to one another. We acknowledge we are as broken as the Gerasene Demoniac and there's nothing we can do to fix our condition. Perhaps the sin-sick condition of the demon possessed man was a little more obvious, okay, a lot more obvious, but that just makes our situation that much more insidious.

Here's what I mean... When you or I go to the doctor we can tell the doctor what hurts or where we feel the discomfort. When we take Melanie to the doctor it's much more of a guessing game. She can't tell us or the doctor exactly what hurts. That's sort of how we treat sin in our culture today. We don't talk about it. We cover it up. We pretend it doesn't exist. We even go so far as to call sin not a sin. Sometimes we deny a sin is a sin with good intentions. We want to include everyone so much, we're afraid if we call out a sin the other person will get mad at us and leave our tribe. We've invented all kinds of ways to cover up our brokenness. The end result is we never receive the one thing that can heal us, the love and forgiveness of God. So, we continue to wallow in our sinful nature.

I don't know what demons possess your life. I know Jesus has the power and the authority to cast them out. If you want them to be cast out... If we want them cast out... William Barclay the renown Scottish Biblical Commentator states

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he would have thought the people of the town would have regarded the whole matter with joy. I mean a very sick man was healed. Instead, they regarded it with terror. Anyone would have thought they would have begged Jesus to stay with them and show them even more of His amazing power. Instead, they begged Him to get out of their district as soon as possible. The reaction of the people is really no surprise, just take one look at the cost. Two thousand head of pigs were sacrificed in order to heal one demon possessed man. How much more would it cost to heal the whole town? Of course, they were afraid...

We're no different. To live a healthy God centered life what do I have to give up? Excessive Internet Shopping... Over eating... My couch potato existence... If I'm being honest, most of the time I beg Jesus to leave me alone... In this Bible story, they said in effect to Jesus, 'You care for men; we care for swine. You don't count the cost, only the blessings. We care for the property rights of the people in this town. That is where we differ. So, Jesus, get out and leave us alone...' Oh, we may not use language so direct and honest, but we say the same thing. We say of social issues: What has Jesus of Nazareth to do with this? Shut Him up in our churches, but don't let Him out to roam freely in our streets, or into our homes, and especially not into the parts of my inner self that I keep hidden from others... When Jesus is on the loose, he's a dangerous character. He might make some changes in me... in us...

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As I begin to wind down, yes there is an eventual end in sight... But first, I have to wonder, who was in more need of healing in this story, the mad man in the tombs or the people of the town... The people of the town weren't insane by ancient or modern standards, but they were suffering from a terrible malady that has cursed humanity from the beginning. They placed property values above human values. They demanded the one Man who could have brought them true spiritual understanding and healing to depart from their midst. Contemplate that tragedy for a while!

We can expand this story to include all of society. There are many legions of demons still to be driven out of our modern civilization. Their number is legion: war, racial discrimination, economic injustice, ignorance, alcoholism, drug addiction, greed, and lust, just to name a few. One thing I know for certain, Christ is adequate to drive them all out. At a time when the irrational and the fanatic make the headlines, and crazy religion is on the rise all over the world, how good it is to know Jesus Christ speaks still speaks words of sweet sanity, and has come to put us in our right minds!

May there be peace on earth, and as the song goes, and let it begin with me.

**(SLIDE)** Come Lord Jesus; heal us, heal our towns, our nation, and heal our world today, Amen.