

## **Legion**

*Isaiah 65 1-9; Luke 8:26-39*

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This story in Luke is riddled with pain and yet I find great hope in knowing that: The nameless one known only as Legion has no agency in his restoration and healing. He does nothing. The demons speak loud and clear. They recognize Jesus and beg and plead for him not to torment them. They are flourishing in the graveyard possessing this poor man relegated to a living death. They do not want to be sent back to the abyss, rendered powerless and forgotten, do not go seeking Jesus. They know where evil is contained and kept at bay and that's enough for them. They are glad the demons have found a place to lodge that is not within them or those they love. They are going about their work, tending the swine, paying the guards to deal with Legion, making sure he is watched, and recaptured when he's been chased out into the wilds.

No one is seeking change. Everyone in the story, save for Jesus, is complacent. There is no reason to believe transformation is possible and every reason to believe things will remain the same.

I suspect the people of this region thought that the ways things are is the way they will always be. Maybe their lives are good enough. Surely some wish they could help Legion, but think he is too far gone, beyond their abilities to restore or bring relief. Maybe they, like us, shake their heads at the suffering but have no idea how to address it or perhaps they just don't want anything to interfere too much with their own affairs, economic or otherwise. No doubt an occasional passerby offers a sandwich or a few bucks out of guilt or pity.

But here is what give me hope today: None of this matters. None of this, as intractable and inevitable as it seems to us, thwarts the upending, all-powerful, saving love of God. Jesus comes unbidden to Gentile territory, a place he ought not be, a Jewish Savior going to those who keep pigs. A religious leader unafraid of being rendered unclean in a cemetery. A Rabbi who heals on the Sabbath, a teacher who eats with tax collectors. This is the One who enters the way things are and makes all things new. Whether we expect it, want it, like it, perceive it or do anything to help it come to fruition.

And this gives me great hope.

Legion does nothing He does not lunge for the hem of Jesus' garment. He does not say, "you can heal me if you wish." No one comes to Jesus on his behalf, not a mother or father. No friend digs a hole in the roof and lowers him to the feet of the Savior. He is friendless and without an advocate. He is excommunicated without the ability to speak on his own behalf and

with no one to speak for him and NONE OF THIS MATTERS. None of this long, hideous list of indignities and suffering can keep Jesus from Legion, none of the litany of terrible circumstances can prevent the love of God from making Legion whole.

And this gives me great hope. Jesus goes to the graveyard, cast out the demons and then they get stirred up and speak. Then the people take notice. Finally, clothed and in his right mind through no effort or work, no righteousness or worthiness, the one known as Legion has the capacity to tell his story, to be a witness, keep bringing the kingdom to bear long after Jesus leaves, all in the wake of the unbidden, uncontrollable, unfathomable, resurrection power of our God.

This gives me so much hope because I may well not be Legion, I do feel helpless sometimes. I don't know what it is to be beset by demons, I do know that evil feels intractable. And while I pray not to be those fearful angry towns people, I know I've too often become numb to the suffering of so many, overwhelmed by the scope and scale and hideous variety of the world's problems that I close my eyes, or go to the other side of the road or send the very ones away Jesus says belong to the kingdom of God. I've wanted to relegate all the hurt and evil and suffering and sin to some far away graveyard that I don't have to see, that I enlist others with fewer options to manage, that I keep on the margins of my mind and the periphery of my life. But none of this will keep Jesus from the least and the lost and the last, from you, or from, me, or from Legion.

And this gives me great hope.

Jesus goes headlong into the very places and difficult spaces we'd rather keep at bay. Jesus comes without warning, heads to the neighborhoods we avoid at all costs, to the people who've been confined in tombs, with no home, advocate, or hope and unleashes the power of God to heal and make whole, to restore and to reclaim, to bring back from the brink of death and make witnesses to the resurrection power of the Most High God.

I remember and this gives me great hopes. And when I all but lose hope, God makes crosses the locus of redemption, graveyards places of new life, tax collectors, disciples, deniers rocks of the church, disbelieved women his chosen evangelists, and Legion a witness to the very community that rejected him.

This gives me great hope, as we wrestle with the demons of fear and hate, the ones of division, poverty, war, injustice and oppression. None of them a match for the Savior who calms the sea and conquers the grave. I need this hope.

Jesus will not leave us alone. He will not let nakedness or affliction or distress or persecution or famine or peril or sword separate us from the love of God. No graveyard is too remote, no chains too strong, no demon too relentless to defeat the One who came to bring life, abundant and eternal.

Friends, I don't know when you've been Legion. I don't know when you've felt as if you were the walking dead. I don't know what's imprisoned you or to what you've been shackled. I don't know when you've been so consumed by suffering that you didn't have the strength to ask for help. But I do know that none of this prevents Jesus' saving power from coming to you. I do know Jesus shows up unbidden, unexpected, in the deadest and deadliest places in world to bring new life.

And this gives me such hope. I know that Jesus is in Uvalde, Texas and Eastern Ukraine, He is right now breaking through barriers on death row and walking down the halls of hospitals, nursing homes, and shelters, safe houses and homeless encampments, no matter if I am complacent or hard-hearted, turning my back on Legion or neglecting the God who relentlessly cries out to us "Here I am, Here I am!"

Find hope in knowing that: God refuses to forget Legion. He won't forget you or me. God does not give up on those relegated to a living death. And when we're the one who can't utter a word, too beaten down to beg, too consumed by forces beyond our control to know what to say, who to ask, or how to take the next step, Jesus comes to us and sees our humanity and no matter the cost drowns the demons in the sea.

And this gives me such hope, but also no small amount of fear because a power that great, that beyond my control is bound to upend the status quo, and disrupt the way things are, this power calls for a response that is my life, my all.

Once we've been made whole by the Most High God, named, claimed and saved, we're called to be his witnesses. To tell the story and live a life worthy of the calling. We are to be the legion of disciples who put people before profits, forgiveness over retribution, and the last, first. We are to put everything we have and all we are in service to the love of Christ in which we have been clothed.

And there are a legion of problems, a legion of suffering, a legion of ways the demonic is unleashed, a legion of the least of these, a legion of those longing for relief. But these are very the places where we know Jesus will be found. This is where Jesus sends us, legions of his witnesses, to preach to valleys of dry bones until God gives them breath, to scatter gospel seeds with abandon instead of building bigger barns, to be fools for Christ who imagine a world in which everyone is clothed and housed, welcomed and treasured, a world when enemies become friends and no one is destined to a living death because Jesus has saved us and he came to save the world, and now our call is to proclaim all he has done for us, knowing the power of God will make us a legion, for good, a legion of hope.