

[Luke 8:26-39](#)

We had hardly passed the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic when Vladimir Putin began his invasion of Ukraine. For our world, it has been one storm, closely followed by another.

You could say that is what Jesus and his disciples face in this story. From the storm on the lake to the storm in an individual's life, a storm so violent that he has effectively been put in an outdoor solitary confinement by his society.

Yet as Jesus stilled the storm on the lake he now stills the storm in this man's life. Surely this story, then, is good news for a world facing its own storms.

We might think that a story of someone infested by many demons is far from our experience and beliefs today, but the themes of the story are in fact profoundly relevant to us.

Yes, it is remote in one sense, even for someone like me who does believe in the existence of the demonic, because even I don't see demons under every bed. I can only think of one or two cases where I am certain I have encountered them. And in my opinion only a few Christians are called to confront them as Jesus does here.

But I still find relevant themes here for our life and mission today. Luke himself certainly didn't see this as purely confined to the ministry of Jesus. You can see that in the use of one particular expression that occurs elsewhere in his writings. The man addresses Jesus as 'Son of the Most High God' (verse 28). Not only was this a title that the Archangel Gabriel used twice when telling Mary about the child she would conceive (Luke 1:32, 35) it is also a title that pops up in Luke's other book, the Acts of the Apostles, when Paul is faced by a demonised girl (Acts 16:17). Now if that is the case, Luke must have assumed that this kind of ministry was not unique to Jesus, but it continues with his followers.

Firstly, the story reminds us we are in a *spiritual battle*.

Where did Jesus fight his initial great spiritual battle? In the wilderness, and the Holy Spirit led him there (Luke 4:1). Note the contrast with the afflicted man in this story:

Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. (Verse 29b)

The man has not been led by the Spirit but driven by the demon – to where? Solitary places. The Greek word translated ‘solitary places’ is the same one used for the desert where Jesus faced his three temptations.

What are the differences? Jesus is led by the Spirit, the man is driven by the demon. Jesus resists temptation, but the man does not or cannot resist the forces of evil.

We know only too well our own battles with evil and temptation, especially when we are in solitary places, isolated from the support and encouragement of others. How ashamed we feel when we realise yet again that we have not conquered sin and temptation like Jesus did in his earthly life.

But the key to winning the battle is Jesus. When we have failed and need forgiveness again, we remember that he has won the battle against evil not just on his own but on our behalf. Ultimately, he conquered it at the Cross. When we have faith in him and are united with him, then we are clothed in his victory, not our failure. The Father looks at the repentant sinner, united with Christ, and sees the victory over sin of his Son. This is Good News!

And not only that, Jesus gives us hope for our future battles. For just as he was led by the Spirit, so since Pentecost he promises the Spirit to us, too. We can be led by the Spirit as well. When we are faced with temptation, then we can call on the Holy Spirit to strengthen us in resistance and holiness. That’s why Paul writes these encouraging words on temptation in 1 Corinthians 10:

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.
(1 Corinthians 10:13)

Secondly, this is a story about *power*.

I’m sure you will remember from other biblical stories that in ancient times there was something powerful about a person’s name. You will recall stories where people are given particular names with certain meanings, because these indicate the kind of person or life they are going to lead under God.

But the ancients also believed that if you knew someone’s name, you had power over them. So the demons try this on early in the story, even though there seems to be a note of fear in what they get the man to say:

‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!’ (Verse 28b)

They know who Jesus is. And they know what he can do to them.

Jesus, though, shows no fear. He asks the name and takes control.

Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’

‘Legion,’ he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. (Verses 30-31)

Jesus has authority as Son of the Most High God, and he knows all about the demons controlling this man. Who is in charge here? Jesus.

Again, this is good news for us. Jesus knows the names of those who oppress us. He has power over the forces of darkness that make our lives miserable. He is coming for them.

Sometimes, that means quite a wait. We don’t know how long this man had been afflicted by demons. Sometimes it is quicker. In other cases they will be dealt with at the Last Judgement.

I believe that Jesus is coming for Vladimir Putin. There will be a dreadful price for him to pay if he does not repent. So too will there be for the monsters in power in Beijing, who persecute Christians, Uyghur Muslims, and others. I think this is part of what we call ‘Good news for the poor.’

One of my favourite Psalms for appreciating this is Psalm 73, where Asaph the Psalmist begins by talking about how the wicked have everything their own way and the righteous suffer (verses 1-16). But then he enters the sanctuary of God (verse 17), the place of worship, where God is acknowledged as King, and he sees things differently:

Surely you place them on slippery ground;
you cast them down to ruin.
How suddenly are they destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors!
They are like a dream when one awakes;
when you arise, Lord,
you will despise them as fantasies. (Psalm 73:18-20)

God places the wicked on slippery ground. Don't just look for instant obliteration: watch the unfolding of history, and pray. The power of God will prevail one day, and especially at the Last Judgement.

Thirdly and finally, this story is about *restoration*.

Contrast the man at the beginning of the story and at the end. At the beginning he has not worn clothes for a long time (verse 27) but after the demons are expelled he is 'dressed' (verse 35). I wonder where the clothes came from. Did Jesus send the disciples to get some?

At the beginning of the story he is shouting in a loud voice (verse 28) but afterwards he is 'in his right mind' (verse 35).

At the beginning of the story he has been living in tombs, not a house for a long time (verse 27) but at the end Jesus sends him back to his community, and he returns as a witness to Jesus (verses 38-39).

He is restored in so many ways. The physical and material restoration of clothing. The restoration of his mind. The restoration of relationships with his fellow villagers. And key to all this is that after Jesus' powerful intervention the man is 'sitting at Jesus' feet' (verse 35). This is the power of the Gospel.

And therefore this is what we are called to proclaim and to show. We proclaim restoration of relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We show it in material provision – and the clothes here inevitably made me think of the Knaphill clothes bank.

Yes, we who benefit from the victory of Jesus and his power in the battle against evil now need to share this with others. Like the man, we are to 'Return home and tell how much God has done for [us]' (verse 39). Alongside it, Jesus calls us to demonstrate all the ways in which his restoring love works: in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, offering healing love to the disturbed, and reconciliation of relationships.

The only question is, when are we going to start?