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Luke 8:26-39

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My guess is that you know this guy. - -

- Ok maybe you don't know someone

- who is so possessed by their demons -

- that they end up escaping protective custody, -

- running around naked,

- and living in a cemetery,

- but my guess is that you do know someone -

- who is so possessed by their demons

- that they are totally shunned by regular society -

- someone who is so confused about who they are -

- that they just can't relate -

- to the people they encounter on a daily basis

- someone whose quirks,

- hurts or personal care habits -

- make it extremely difficult for them to fit in. - -

- Sometimes you know this guy's name - -

- chances are that you don't know this guy personally -

- you probably know him as

- the guy who everybody avoids

- when they see him walking down the street,

- or the guy who keeps talking about their issues

- making anyone who is listening -

- a little uncomfortable in the process -
- or the guy who always moves to stand on the edge of the room -
- away from others -
- when a group starts to gather. - -
- Mostly when this guy appears -
- folks avert their eyes, -
- get surprisingly busy working on one task or another -
- or try to slip by on the other side -
- without making eye contact. - -
- It's not so much, -
- I'm convinced,
- that most folks -
- are trying to be mean to this guy,
- or are trying to exclude this guy from society - -
- No, -
- It's more like, -
- most people just have no idea what to make of this guy. - -
- He's so different from them- -
- his view of the world -
- just doesn't make sense -
- or runs counter to everything they think is true
- his refusal to act like everyone else -
- makes people uncomfortable -
- pushes boundaries -
- challenges the behavioral norms

- that shape our world. -

- His obvious issues

- leave the people he encounters feeling helpless,

- because realistically

- they have no idea how to engage this guy

- how to make his situation better - -

- how to help him become -

- fit into their societal expectations -

- and so -

- we turn away -

- we avoid the conversation that makes us uncomfortable -

- we pretend not to notice the person in the corner -

- because it is easier -

- it's safer -

- and it's far more comfortable -

- than wading into this guy's dysfunction -

- or meeting his demons -

- or walking with him on a journey

- that is very different than our own.-

- Which,

- of course,

- is exactly what Jesus does -

- when the demon-possessed, naked guy -

- appears before him, - -

- Jesus doesn't pick up the pace of his walking,

- Jesus doesn't instantly start a 'deep' conversation with Peter -
- Jesus doesn't try to exchange pleasantries and move on - -

Jesus sees this man,

- not simply as the demon possessed, naked guy, -
- or as a lost cause -
- or as someone so unlike himself that he can't relate,
- no,
- Jesus sees him
- as a fellow child of God-
- so Jesus takes the time -
- to ask this man his name -
- take the time to learn about his problems - -
- takes the time to discover that he is possessed by
- many demons. -
- In fact, this guy is possessed by so many demons,
- that the name Jesus receives for him -
- is Legion -
- which may not mean too much to us -
- but when you know that a typical Roman Legion
- had 4,000 to 6,000 soldiers
- then the depth of this man's possession
- starts to come into focus, - -
- but a legion isn't enough to slow Jesus down either. -
- He faces the evil head-on. -
- Jesus draws on God's power to free this guy

- from his demons -

- and in the process -

- Jesus changes this man's life forever - -

- Thanks to Jesus -

- this man who has been isolated and alone,

- who has been on the edges of society,

- who is hurting and broken -

- experiences healing, -

- experiences welcome,

- experiences community- -

- To me -

- it is a powerful story

- of God's transformational love at work in the world, -

- it is an extraordinary example of what can happen -

- when one takes the time -

- to see the other, -

- to pay attention to a different narrative,

- to listen and learn about another's experience, -

- and then to offer help,

- that is truly helpful. - -

- And to me this is a workable model -

- for how we might address some of the demons -

- that seem to be plaguing our world today.

- Just imagine the impact it would make in the world

- if you and I and all of God's people -

- were to follow this example
- to follow the four steps Jesus takes -
- in dealing with the possessed, naked guy.

First -

- Jesus sees the man as a child of God -

- I know this seems simple -
- but it is amazing to me -
- how hard this step is today - -
- how hard it is for people to see one another
- as fellow children of God -
- as fellow members of the body of Christ
- as people created in God's image. -
- We categorize people -
- by their gender,
- by their sexual orientation,
- by their political beliefs,
- by their faithfulness or lack of faithfulness,
- by where they live,
- by the color of their skin. - -
- When we do that,
- we tend to focus on what divides us from them. -
- We stop seeing the person, the individual -
- We see the group, the belief, the ideology -
- which serves to dehumanize and distance us

- from one another. - -

- When we see the person,

- as Jesus does,

- it changes our perspective -

- compassion begins to replace complacency. -

- “Us and them” begins to become “we”.

- Isolation begins to be replaced by community. - -

- Whether it is ‘that guy’ in your community that’s a little odd -

- or a member of ‘that group’ in society

- that you don’t agree with, understand or like, -

- Seeing that person -

- as a child of God -

- makes a difference - -

- and once you see the individual -

- then you are ready to follow Jesus’ second step -

- ready to **Listen and Learn-**

- this step is hard as well -

- particularly if you are a problem solver -

- who wants to instantly find a solution. -

- Ask open ended questions. -

- Listen to the answers. -

- Don’t assume you understand what the individual

- has gone through or is experiencing. -

- Jesus, if you notice,

- listens to the demons -

- who beg not to go back to the abyss. -

- Now I freely admit that I don't understand -

- exactly what the demons mean or -

- how the whole thing with the pigs

- is better, - -

- but Jesus' doesn't simply walk up to the man -

- and act. -

- He listens - - even to the demons

- and factors that into -

- Step Three -

- which is **Acting against evil to bring Healing.**

- Now this step may sound a little harder for us to accomplish-

- than it was for Jesus,

- but just because we lack Jesus' specific powers and wisdom, -

- doesn't mean we can't act against evil-

- to help bring healing in the world.-

- We can stand with those who are oppressed. -

- We can speak with those whose voices aren't heard clearly. -

- We can become active in community systems. -

- We can care for those who are hurting. -

- We can love the unloved -

- one person, one hurt at a time. -

- Now please, -

- don't try and provide more assistance than is helpful -
 - and don't bite off more than you can chew.
- If someone has severe mental problems,
 - don't try and be their psychologist. -
 - Listen to their story,
 - care for them as best you can and
 - help them find a trained counselor.
- If a situation arises that might put your life at risk,
 - don't simply dive head first into the mix,
 - instead help by bringing the right people into the room.
- Provide just enough help to be helpful to the other person,
 - not so much help that it is harmful to them and to you.
- I can't tell you what that will look like in every situation,-
 - to act against evil to bring healing,
 - but my sense is that it involves meeting the other -
 - where they are -
 - and doing you best to assist them as they-
 - try and take a healthy step forward in their life. - -
- And once things seem to be heading in a more healthy direction,
 - then follow the fourth and final step Jesus models -
 - **Go out and tell the story**
 - **of God's transformational love.** -
- After experiencing healing,
 - the formerly naked, possessed guy wants to stay with Jesus and his group. -

- I get that, - -

- the man's history with his community wasn't great. -

- He was probably embarrassed about all that had happened

- pained by the hurt that had been experienced -

- ready to walk away, -

- but Jesus knows -

- that there is no better witness to God -

- than the individual who has experienced God's healing love.-

- Jesus knows that

- through this man's transformation, -

- the community will discover hope for new life

- thanks to the love of God.

- Through this man's transformation, -

- the community will discover that God's power -

- is stronger than evil. -

- Through this man's transformation,

- the community will discover that

- when we follow Jesus

- even seemingly insurmountable problems

- can be overcome.

See the other as a child of God, - -

- **Listen** and Learn, - -

- **Act** against Evil,

- **Go and Tell** of God's transformational love - -

- We may not know a naked, possessed guy living in a cemetery,
 - but I am convinced that these four steps that Jesus models for us today -
 - can help us find a healthy way to deal
 - with that guy we don't know what to do with -
 - or those people who aren't like us -
 - or those societal changes that we fear a little, -
- because when follow the approach Jesus takes with the possessed man,
 - then we begin to see the person, not the problem,
 - we begin to see the source of the hurt, not our own anger,
 - we begin to see that God's love is more powerful than evil
 - and we begin to see the change our witness to God
 - can make in the world.