

The abyss

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There are very few idiomatic tropes that carry meaning across generations, let alone thousands of years. Mental Floss generates thousands of clicks by giving readers insights into how words and phrases have changed over the years. There are, however, a few images that carry weight over centuries, one of which we hear from the lips of Legion in the [Gospel lesson for Sunday](#). Keenly aware of the power of Jesus, the demons “begged him not to order them to go back to the abyss,” Luke tells us.

While this fear is from the demons in this story, there seems to be something universal about their fear. Hollywood knows this, as images of the deep abyss show up with great regularity in films from *This is the End* to *Indiana Jones*. Despite long giving up on the idea of a three-tiered universe, humanity seems to have written in its DNA a fear of that which is deep below, be it hell, the earth’s core, or, as is likely the source of the fear, that which resides deep within our souls.

We would prefer that Jesus not dig too deeply within us. We’d like to keep those deepest parts of us nicely locked away, never to be dealt with. There is some comfort in not having to deal with our own, inherent prejudices, fears, and sinfulness; even if it means holding onto those undesirable parts for eternity. But Jesus will not allow us to stay out of the abyss. In his life and death, he showed us that only in the depths: his temptation in the wilderness and his decent into hell; is the fullness of God’s grace-filled love for us discovered.

Legion can’t understand this. They beg not to be sent to the abyss, and Jesus grants their wish. They are forced into a herd of unclean animals that promptly head down the steep ravine and drown in the waters below. He banishes them not into the abyss, but into death by shallowness.

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