

Hostile territory (Luke 8:26-39)

Jesus disrupts the narrative in multiple ways.

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All three synoptic gospels offer us a version of the tale unfolded in Luke 8:26-39, and I am struck by the pertinence it has for us today. What does it tell us about Jesus? And what does it tell us about ourselves? Jesus takes off for the other side of the Sea of Galilee with his disciples, landing in Gentile territory. They are already wound up by surviving a storm on the way, and I can't help identifying with them and wondering how they took in the events that followed. As soon as Jesus steps on shore, he is greeted by a naked man who has been living among the tombs. This "Are you kidding me?" moment feels very familiar in 2025.

This trip to potentially hostile environs is just one way Jesus disrupts the narrative. In healing the man, he also talks to the demons. Evil recognizes good, and power recognizes a greater power. The repetition of this dramatic story about a herd of swine drowning suggests something like this must have happened; the details are memorably necessary to prove a point. The gospel insists we believe.

The people of Gerasene respond to their countryman's healing with disbelief. They express a practical human perspective. Most of us sort people into categories; it makes us feel like things are easier to understand. Once a madman or a loser or anathema, surely always the above? Definitions and groupings of who is with us or against us may feel called for in our current political climate. I remember my first experience of community organizing, and how I resisted the principle that there are no permanent allies and no permanent enemies. When categories are transgressed,

when the dissonance is cognitive, we blame and fear the one who makes it obvious.

Jesus will have to go.

The man possessed, now healed, wants to go along with Jesus. Don't we all want to be in relationship with someone who has helped us? I'm sometimes guilty of thinking impulsively about whether something that touches me signals a new direction I ought to take in life. Maybe it's simply something I can explore inside myself. Maybe I don't need to sign up for a class or be certified in whatever the expertise is myself.

Maybe it's enough to be thankful.

I suspect the disciples are extremely thankful to be back in the boat, heading to the familiar side of the lake—although we know what lies ahead for them. Like the healed man, they will be sharing the good news of how much God has done for them. And just like the Gerasenes, the people in authority will be afraid.