

Lord Jesus, may the healing power of your love speak to us today through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

- Do you feel you are on the outside or the inside? Of your family? In a group of your friends? At work?
- Simon was 14, and always on his mobile phone. He needed it to stay in touch, to be part of the group, to feel included. He wanted to be part of the gang, to be on the inside. But Gary had been having a go at him today about his trainers, which weren't cool – weren't Nike. He was glad to escape school at the end of the day. He got home, grunted at his mum, and went up to his room, getting his phone out of his back pocket as he did so. And there they were. Horrible messages from his so called friends about his awful footwear. All over FaceBook. And it didn't stop there. Simon had so desperately wanted to be on the inside, but he felt more on the outside, more alienated, than ever. And he couldn't escape.
- Outsiders are seen as different, unsafe, not fitting in. At least that's how we so often see ourselves.
- The man of the city possessed by demons was clearly on the outside. Who knows what mental health issues he was suffering from but he was evidently ostracised by everyone. Socially unacceptable, homeless, violent, smelly and embarrassingly short of underwear. They tried imprisoning him, keeping him under guard, tying him up with chains but he had this habit of escaping. Perversely his strength was one of his biggest barriers to conformity.
  - Who knows what events in his past had influenced his behaviour, but it certainly wasn't pretty.
- Susan had always been excruciatingly shy. She would inevitably blush deep pink if anyone even spoke to her. It made her feel naked, whenever she was singled out. She felt everyone was looking at her. She had a small one bedroom flat on the other side of town which she kept spotlessly clean. It didn't take long. Now in her early thirties, she had never been in a relationship and she often felt alone, of an evening, in her little sitting room which was both her sanctuary and her prison. She longed to escape, but she didn't know how. She enviously imagined her work colleagues going for a drink after they finished in the office, but every time she was invited she suddenly didn't want to join them. It was just too dangerous! And in the end they stopped asking.
- Did the man of the city possessed by demons want to be healed? To be brought in from the outside?
  - He certainly recoiled when Jesus began challenging his demons. *'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me'*
- What happens next is crucially important. *Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?'*
  - Is he speaking to the man or to the demons?
- If he is speaking to the man, then this is the offer of the beginnings of a relationship between Jesus and the man. A chance to build up trust, to invite the man inside. But we never get to know the man's name. Instead he starts talking about his problems. There were just so many of them.
  - *'Legion'; for many demons had entered him.'*
  - If Jesus was talking to the demons. He forced them to name themselves.
- The first step to stopping your demons having power over you is to name them. To acknowledge they're there.
- Charles wasn't an alcoholic. He knew he wasn't. He could stop drinking any time he wanted to. He just had a few glasses of wine at the end of the day to destress. It was hard work keeping in with all his clients. OK, occasionally it turned into a bottle. Or two. But not more than once a week. Two or three times a week tops. And weekends were different. They were for enjoying yourself. No one was going to stop him having a few beers with his mates then. He didn't think his speech was slurred. Why should he take any notice of his wife as she looked at him with those pathetic worried eyes, when she asked him not to go out on a Saturday lunchtime? He wasn't an alcoholic. He just wanted to be in with his friends.
- Until you name your demons, it is highly unlikely that you can stop them having power over you.
- Do you have any demons? Of course you don't. You're far too normal! ... Aren't you?
  - Name them! They lose some of their power when you do.
- The demons are sent into the pigs. Please don't get hung up about the pigs! If it helps, think of them as rats. Or mosquitos. It doesn't seem so bad to us if a cloud of mosquitos perish. This story isn't saying Jesus doesn't

care about animals. Rather it's looking at it from a Jewish perspective. The pigs were unclean. Jews are not supposed to enjoy a bacon sandwich. Demons are unclean, unhealthy, life-denying. So the two belong together. And they hurtle to destruction. *'Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.'*

- Of course, letting go of your demons is destructive, dangerous. You're forced to realise that you are naked. So what do you do? You put on some clothes. *'they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.'*
- Of course, letting go of your demons is destructive, dangerous. It can materially affect the lives of the people around you. Stir them out of the comfortable suffering you are putting them under. *'When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off'* Their livelihood had disappeared over the steep bank into the water.
- Jane lived in an abusive relationship. It was never very much, she told herself. Just a few slaps every now and again. But one day it was rather more than that and she was left bruised and bleeding. All she had to do, once he'd stormed off was to ring the helpline and walk out of the door. But where would she go? How would she survive? She didn't think she was gifted and her self-esteem was rock bottom. And who would believe her? Roger was such a pillar of the community. Perhaps it was better with the demon she knew. And so she did nothing. The change in lifestyle was just too terrifying. After all it didn't happen every day. She put the idea back in the box marked 'later', and refused to name it.
  - Of course, letting go of your demons is destructive, dangerous. But until you do, nothing changes.
- But *'The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.'*
- You'd imagine that the natural thing would be for Jesus to welcome the man aboard the boat, take him back into Jewish territory, a foreign land for the healed man, now that he had named and confronted his demons and allow him to follow him away from his previous life. But Jesus doesn't. He sends him home. Back to be on the inside, possibly for the first time in his life. Back amongst his own people. His own family. The city. Where, for Luke, there is community and support.
  - And he arms him with a direction. A purpose. *'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.'* And that's what he does *'proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.'* Perhaps one of the reasons for this miracle story being included in the Gospel is that is a model for the hope and direction of the first Christians in the book of Acts. And a model for us. To proclaim *throughout the city how much Jesus had done for' us*
- Those on the inside may not be as perfect as they think they are. Are you on the inside or the outside?
- The Jews thought they were very definitely on the inside. They were God's chosen people. They would never eat pig's flesh. Isaiah rails against such people who do, in our first reading, *'a people who provoke me to my face ... who eat swine's flesh'*. But Jesus has this uncomfortable habit of disturbing those who think they are on the inside and therefore secure, who base their security on what they do, rather than on the direction they are heading, those who think life is fine and who don't need to change, and challenging them in their self-satisfied contempt of those who are different to them. Is that a demon to name?
  - The Jews, the people who were convinced they were God's chosen people, did not eat pig's flesh. But who here is going home to Roast Pork for Sunday lunch? Jesus turns the inside out and the outside in, and that's disturbing as well as liberating in the long run.
- So which of these questions speaks to you? Do you naturally feel on the inside or the outside? Have you got any demons, and have you named them? If your life has been changed like the man in the tombs, whom do you tell? And if you are confident of your own righteousness as part of the Christian family of God, suppose the newly healed man, now clothed, comes to sit next to you in church but has not yet learned the social graces necessary to be a proper Anglican. As he sits in your pew, picking his scabs, singing loudly in all the wrong places, and calling out to the people at the back, what would you say to him and what would you think to yourself? And would he think his long held desire to be included, to be on the inside, was worth having? If not, perhaps that's a demon you should be naming!