

Title: Leave me Alone
Text: Matthew 8.28-34
Theme: Rejecting Christ
Series: Matthew #50
Prop Stmt: We reject Christ because we value the wrong things.

The era known as "modernism" was marked by science and reason rescuing people from ignorance and especially from belief in God. Post-modernism is the child of modernism, but this child is not happy. The post-modern child is depressed, anxious, empty, purposeless and often, very angry. Science has not delivered on its promises. Modernism was supposed to free us from the restraints of God so that we could be free to do whatever we wanted. But, like science, freedom has not delivered on its promises either. So, while the pendulum has swung away from the supernatural (theism) to science ("rationalism") this is not capable of winning the day. Therefore, we can expect the pendulum to swing back to the supernatural, but this time, untethered from belief in the one true God. This means demonic activity and related matters will no longer be whispered about by the clergy and debated as ancient and outmoded theories in graduate courses on the history of psychiatry and psychology. Demonic activity present a problem that defies a solution apart from Christ. But, there is a problem that is even worse. And that is the problem of rejecting Christ.

Read Text:

My grandpa owned a farm in Iowa. He grew corn, soybeans and raised pigs. Pigs are not like Wilbur in Charlotte's Web. Pigs are big, smelly, noisy, smelly, dirty, smelly, sloppy, smelly and quite honestly, are really intimidating to a little boy who grew up in a neighborhood. After a while you get used to the smell, sort of. I found out that pigs do not wake up and go to work. They eat, sleep and create disgusting odors. I also found out that you can sneak up on a pig and scare the bacon out of it, which I loved to do, until I would get caught by my grandpa. If you scared enough pigs, they would stampede from the barn into the mud corral. In the barn there was an opening in the wall that was only wide enough for one big ol' pig to get through at a time. So, if you got the herd all wound up, two of them would try to get through the door at the same time and would get stuck and would squeal and honk and snort and I would laugh my head off, until my grandpa would grab me by the ears. Then I would squeal, honk and snort.

So, as I read and read this text, I realized that this account involves a lot of senses. In Mark's gospel we learn that there are 2,000 pigs. 2,000 pigs stink! I think that the only thing worse than pigs are chickens. So, these disciples, who are most likely already in a foul mood since no one slept the night before, except Jesus, are probably about gagging when they are getting off the boat. I would not be surprised if one of them was saying, "Oh gag, what is that smell? Who died?" Later on in this text, the pigs stampede. That would have been very noisy anyway, but these pigs stampede not because some little boy is yelling "sooie, sooie, sooie" but because they were just invaded by a legion of demons. But there is more than smell and sound. Sight is involved as well. Animals do not

normally commit suicide. To watch an entire herd of pigs run off the edge of a cliff in order to drown in the lake would have been rather shocking.

This is an extremely discouraging text. This is the first public display of Christ being rejected. It is not an anomaly. If Matthew's gospel was put to music, the melody would begin to change into a minor key. As we have noted, there are 9 miracles in chapters 8-9. They are arranged in 3 groups of 3. This is the middle miracle of the middle section. And being in the middle, you realize that this is the bend in the road. The excitement, anticipation, acceptance that initially characterized the public ministry of Christ now begins to show some strain. Not everyone is in love with Jesus. Not everyone wants him to be around. Why does Matthew arrange these accounts like this? In these chapters he is telling us what is involved in being a disciple of Christ. He wants us to know that it is not an easy road. Expect rejection! Expect misunderstanding! Expect for people to say to you that they do not want you around anymore.

Matthew makes this very clear in the way he arranges the story, doesn't he? Did you see it? The text begins with two-demon possessed men coming out of the tombs/caves to meet Jesus. The text ends with the people from the city coming out to meet Jesus. Both find themselves in a position of begging. The demons beg Christ in submission and ask to be sent away. The people beg Christ in rejection. They want him sent away. They want to be left alone. The authority of Christ is clearly on display. Bam! Christ shows up!! And when Christ shows up, he stirs things up. What do we learn about demons from this text?

- they are intelligent

Demons are personal beings. They are able to reason, argue, speak, and therefore, obviously lie. They cannot be trusted for one second. They are wholly evil. There is nothing about them to love and there is nothing about them to trust. While demons are no match for Christ, they are enemies to be aware of and stay away from. Anything that uses demons for the purpose of entertainment or "fun" is dealing with something that will not end well.

- they are powerful

Demons are able to so completely overtake people (and here animals) that the will of the being who is inhabited is rendered inactive and incapable of being able to self-rescue.

- they are destructive

When you see the lives of people who are influenced by the worship of demons, you see destruction. Demons provide instant gratification, so it seems. They give you a sense of power and importance. But, there is a trade-off. In order to get their power, you have to give up your life. In order to feel important, you have to yield to their importance. I have seen villages and towns in 3rd world settings that are given to the worship of demons. I have listened at night to the sounds of the Satan-worshipping ceremonies coming over the hillsides of Haiti as I lay awake and witnessed the results of this in a country given to

disease, poverty, deceit, laziness and despair. Demons are the personification of sin. They always take more from you than what they can give back. Like the worst drug, they just suck the life out of you even as they lie to you and declare that you cannot live without them. So, these men who terrorized others, were themselves terrorized. These men lived in the tombs. Wealthy people purchased caves in order to bury their family members. These men were like dead men walking, but at the same time, no one could control them.

- They are territorial

They took over these men and treated them as their own. In turn, the men attempted to take over the road and treat it like their own. Then we see how they took over the pigs and treated them like their own. It's just that with the pigs, the witnesses were able to see in a very brief amount of time, what will happen to every person who is under the influence of demons and is not rescued. They will be destroyed.

- They know their doom is sure.

Often times in the closing seconds of a basketball game, if one team is too far ahead, the other team will back off and let the victorious team simply run out the clock. It is a sign of respect and acknowledgement of defeat. But, there is no respect on the part of Satan. In Rev. 12.12 we read, "But woe to you O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" These demons know that there is an appointed hour for their doom. But, they are obviously surprised because Christ has shown up before they thought. Christ is already starting to take back what is his, and they are none too happy about it.

All of this sets up the entire point of this text. "And behold" (v.2, 23, now again - 29; 32; 34) these demons just want to be left alone. They have driven these men away from life, away from family, away from the community, away from the town, they are living alone, and they are living in isolation. They are living in brokenness, hopelessness, despair and anger. When they say, "What have you to do with us" they are actually using an idiom that means essentially, what are we to you? We have nothing in common with you. I.e., "LEAVE ME ALONE." Isn't that what sin does to our very persons? Do we not use these very words when we want to just go and sin or keep sinning, or not face our sin? LEAVE ME ALONE!! In their effort to be left alone they attempt to threaten Christ. Look at that in v.29. What are they threatening Christ with? They are threatening to expose him, aren't they? "We know who you really are."

Whoa! Hold the phone for a second. How would you respond if a demon said to you in front of others, "I know who you are?" Initially, that would be terrifying, wouldn't it? Here you are with someone who claims to know your secrets and is threatening to expose them to everyone around you. This is the ultimate blackmail. Evil people do these sorts of things because this is what evil does. Satan has power over you to the degree that he can expose the gap in your life between what you really are and what others think you are. I am not convinced that Satan and his demons know everything about you, but they only

have to pretend to know everything about you since we all have things that we have done, and thought that would bring us great shame if they were ever exposed.

Now notice this for a second. The demons use this as a threat. "We know who you really are." However, God uses this as a means of grace. He really knows what we are. He invites us to confess to him what we are, (that is, agree with his assessment of our lives) NOT in order to shame us, but in order to cleanse us, forgive us and change us! Wow! Now, I will come back to that in a second.

What happens here? These demons are using a tactic that they have apparently used for hundreds of years. They are threatening to expose someone, only, who are they threatening to expose? Jesus! What is there to expose about him? "You are the Son of God!" And, no sooner do the words leave their mouth, than the truth of that begins to set upon them. They threatened him with the truth, and the truth broke their perceived power so that by the next verse, they are begging if they could be sent into the pigs.

By the way, how is the power of evil broken in your life? It is broken by the truth. It is broken by the whole truth and nothing but the truth. When Satan tempts me to despair, (and he will) and tells me of the guilt within (and there is plenty to accuse me of), you tell him, that is not the whole truth. Yes, it is true that I am a big sinner. It is true that I am guilty of every evil, but there is more to this story. The story of my sin is incomplete without the story of my Savior. "Upward I look and see him (Christ on the cross) there, who made an end to all my sin."

Here is the choice that is set before you. You can either follow Christ who knows the truth about you and wants you to admit it before him so that you can be made whole, or you can tell him to leave you alone. But know this, when you tell him to leave you alone, you are aligning yourself with one who will terrorize you. This is the choice that is set before the people of this city. It is a pathetic story.

I. This story is in the context of the call to follow Christ.

Remember that Jesus told the scribe (v.18-20) the cost of following him. Up until that point, things were looking pretty good. Then came the storm on the sea. Now comes another storm, but on the land. On the sea, Jesus demonstrates his power over the creation. Now he demonstrates his power over unseen demonic world. Two men who were hopelessly terrorized and were a terror to others are now free. What is the response? The people want Jesus to leave their land, and leave them alone.

A. Do not expect everyone to follow.

Jesus already told us about this, didn't he? "The way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (7.14) If you follow Christ you will lose friends because not everyone will follow. This will put you on two different roads. Seek them. Love them. Reach out to them. Love them. Serve them, but know that not everyone will follow Christ no matter how convincing your witness is. Is your life more convincing than Christ? No. Many rejected Christ.

B. Do not expect everyone to be happy that you follow Christ.

Some of you have come to Christ out of a desperate situation. Your life was overwhelmed with sin and the consequences of you "fast bound in sin and nature's night." Some people who were your getting loaded friends or your getting high friends were concerned that you were going too far. So, when you initially came to faith in Christ, and your life began to change, some were initially happy. This Jesus thing was working for you. But, that didn't last too long, did it? Pretty soon you became a threat.

C. Do not expect to be understood.

Matthew says (v.33) that the herdsmen went into the city (sounds like in a bit of a panic) and told the people everything that had just happened "to the demon-possessed men." It is quite possible that these herdsmen were trying to save their necks since they were probably watching the pigs for the owners and they just lost a major investment. These herdsmen were no doubt making it very clear that all the blame was to be on Jesus. The people of the city came out to meet Jesus. The change in these two men is undeniable and yet, the people want Jesus to leave.

The only ones who really understood who Jesus was were the demons. If people fail to understand who Jesus is, and what he really came to do, they are certainly going to misunderstand his followers. It is a very lonely place. This is what being a follower of Christ often feels like. You are the odd man out. But this is what Jesus experienced.

D. Do not expect to be appreciated.

40% of the population of Scotland lives in what are called "Schemes." A Scheme is like part housing project and part Indian reservation. Each scheme has its own power structure, which are run more like gangs and mini mafias. They control the flow of drugs, and guns. We are supporting a church-planting effort in these schemes because the need is so dire. The brothers who are seeking to plant churches in these schemes are in some cases, guys who have come to Christ from these contexts. One such guy is Mez McConnell. For the past several months, one of the biggest players in his scheme is a guy named Steve who has repeatedly threatened to kill Mez. Mez keeps telling him about Jesus. "Rick" single-handedly controls the entire heroin in this entire area. About two weeks ago, Rick walked into the church where Mez serves and announced that he wanted to follow Jesus. Mez wasn't so sure. But it looks like it's the real deal. Rick brought in all of his dealers that he supplied for and told them that he was done. He had become a follower of Christ. While most of them thought he was a bit crazy, Rick led 3 of them to Christ.

Early Friday morning, Mez received a text from Rick (3a) who said, "Have you ever read Romans? That is one bad book!" But Rick's family is really entrenched in organized crime. At the moment, they have not done anything, but if Rick continues down this road, his faith in Christ will be responded to. Rick will most likely have to pay a price for this.

E. Do not expect to be accepted.

"Leave me alone" shows up in three different ways. 1) The demons want to be left alone in order to continue to terrorize these men and the area. When it becomes clear that Jesus is not going to give them what they want, they 2) ask to be sent to the pigs. They are so desperate to get away from the presence of Christ that they will inhabit pigs. They want him to leave. He won't, so they implore him if they can leave. 3) Finally, the people from the city come out and implore Jesus to leave.

The disciples are observing all of this. You get the point don't you? Following Jesus may appear to be exciting and novel, and there is an aspect of that, but that is not the entire story. There is rejection. This rejection is not an anomaly. As we know because of what we are focusing on this Good Friday, this example of rejection becomes a dominant theme, until Christ is crucified. He is crucified because of what he says, not because of what he does. When you use your words to identify yourself as a follower of Christ, there is often a cost to that. There will be some people who will not accept you because they refuse to accept Christ. As this movement of rejection grows, so do the number of defections among those who claim to be disciples, until the hundreds are whittled down to a few. That is still the case today. Profession of faith is wonderful and we rejoice in that (and we should). Perseverance in the faith is the fruit of authentic faith. Expect rejection.

II. Rejecting Christ is a rejection of rationality.

They chose:

A. The demon-possessed over Christ.

These guys were a danger to others. They were a danger to themselves (Mark 5.5). Satan never delivers what he promises. He can only destroy. He is hell-bent on destroying as many people as possible because he hates the Creator. Therefore Satan hates everything that the Creator loves. If you want to show hatred toward someone you will find something they treasure and you will seek to destroy it. These people were willing to live with the demon-possessed men, but not willing to have Christ among them.

This is another way of saying, that they were choosing despair over true love. These people lived with a supernatural power that threatened them, that was destroying the men it inhabited, and that destroyed the pigs that they took control of. The path of destruction and its destination were obviously put on display. These men were headed for the same destruction that the pigs experienced, unless they were rescued. Yet, astonishingly, the people were unwilling for Jesus to stay, while they had obviously become used to the demon-possessed men.

B. Pigs over people.

Now, the herdsmen are obviously upset. They just lost an enormous herd of pigs. If the pigs weighed around 200-220 lbs. (which is less than what they are around here), you are looking at a loss of around \$450,000 in today's dollars. That's a lot of bacon and they had no insurance to cover their loss. The herdsmen just lost their jobs. The owners just lost their investment. The people were faced with someone who had authority that they had not seen before. Matthew describes the scene as the people hearing about the pigs, seeing the men whose lives have been rescued, and begging Jesus to leave. "But wait!" Do you not want to scream that? If Jesus can do this, can he not rescue you? He can, but you have to admit your need of being rescued. And that is the hardest thing for people to realize.

Both the demons and the people are described by Matthew as begging. The demons begged Jesus to let them go inhabit the pigs and the people beg Jesus to leave them alone. Ironically, they begged Jesus to do what the demons initially attempted to do. They all wanted Jesus to leave them alone.

C. Death over life.

The demons knew they were doomed. Apart from Christ, these men had no hope. What happened to the pigs will happen to people who reject Christ. People were used to the hopelessness of these men. They were dead-people living and preferred it that way. Leave us alone! We do not want to live. (8.34 and 9.1)

This account ends. It reminds me so much of Palm Sunday and what we call the Passion Week. The chapter begins with enthusiasm and crowds. It ends with rejection. The result is clear. The majority rejected Christ. But there will be a few whose lives are changed forever. Are you still willing to follow?