

Luke 8:26-39
June 19, 2022

Two Sides

The geography of the bible is important and often overlooked. If one likes maps, it can also be fun to learn. I am sure that you have perused a map or two in your life, maybe even the ones in the back of your bible.

If you have never tried, it can also be a helpful way to get through a sermon; study the maps in the back, and if you don't have a bible with maps in the back, you might think about getting one as a way to pass the time during sermons. You might also learn something.

One of the maps will be of the Jewish homeland, or Palestine, in New Testament times, and you will see Mt. Hermon in the north above the Sea of Galilee, which runs down through the Jordan River and into the Sea they call, "Dead," because there is too much salt in it to sustain any kind of life.

On the Western side of the river is a tripartite division of what had previously been Israel; Galilee in the north, Samaria in the middle, and Judea in the south. Judea is the homeland of the Jewish, but in the time of Jesus there was a large Jewish community on the western side of the lake up in Galilee, and it was from that community that Jesus came.

The eastern side of the lake is the country called the Golan Heights in the present time. Then it was known

as the, "Decapolis," which means, the land of the ten cities, where lived almost exclusively Romans citizens; gentile, pagan.

It helps to know about this geography because in the first three gospels, Jesus and his followers are constantly going back and forth across the lake; from the land of their upbringing, to the land of the gentiles on the other side (admittedly, I am drawing a distinction that is tighter than the reality was, there were gentiles on the western side and undoubtedly Jewish people to the east, but the general description holds true).

It is helpful to notice when you are reading the gospels that Jesus and his followers *do* go back and forth, and we are meant to understand that when Jesus is on the eastern side, he is interacting with gentiles (people of other genealogical backgrounds), and when he is on the west, it is the people of his birth.

Anyway, he encountered a man who was so torn up inside, suffering a demon possession, that he had been forced to live on the outskirts of town in the cemetery. There is a symbolism here, it was as if he was dead.

In contemporary times, people might say he suffered a psychosis, or one of several other maladies that seem to have similar symptoms. There is a discussion about the relationship between the biblical presentation of spirit possession and the modern medical understanding of mental illness and health. Some are

not comfortable with the equating of the two, others insist upon it.

Either way, this man was not able to live among his people. The story is, of course, well-known. Jesus had a conversation with the demons, which turn out to have been plural, hence the name, “Legion.” An agreement was made and the Legion were transferred from the man into a nearby herd of pigs, which then rushed headlong into the lake where they drowned, leaving the man all healed up and ready to go, and the pig-herders angry at their loss.

In Christ, Paul wrote, there is no Jew nor Gentile . . . One of the main features of the background in this story is the ancestral fatherhood of the two sets of people. They were *not* from the same gene pool, not related, as we say. They were not family.

Even though the gospel doesn’t make too big of an issue of it here, we are meant to understand that the so-called Gerasene demoniac *was* a gentile and that a gentile being healed, being saved, is one of the main parts of the story.

One’s background is only a thin cover for one’s humanity. Everyone is from the same gene pool, everyone is related, everyone is family. A man of “unredeemable” heritage bumps into Jesus and is saved nonetheless. Could it be that there is no unredeemable person? Whether Jesus was on the east or the west side of the lake, he ran into people, pretty much the same underneath their exterior garb.

The other main part of the story is the exorcism itself, which reveals the truth that life is spiritual, regardless of how healthy or unhealthy a person can be said to be. Some of the people Jesus met were not functioning well, however it is explained.

Theologians speak of the human condition, usually in terms of its negative aspects; everyone sins, everyone dies, it is part of the human condition; everyone is limited in space and time and in capabilities and perspective, it is part of what it means to be human. Everyone suffers in some way. One of the features of the human condition is that it is universally shared across all the distinctions.

We all struggle with our physical, mental, spiritual and relational health. It is part of life for everyone. And Jesus illustrates here that the same solution stands for those on both sides of the lake, those both within and outside the family.

Healing comes when we are given to see ourselves as we are. There may be physiological aspects of both illness and health in it, illness and health are both *spiritual and physical*. There is a bit of mystery involved. There may be a measure of sensibility in it, but it may not always make sense.

More than anything there is a Christ encounter, whether we speak of it that way or not. There is a recognition that we have been accepted by God, leading to an acceptance of ourselves, and others. The encounter liberates us from our past, from our

sins, from our biases and prejudices, from our unsound judgments, and given time, from our bad habits; and it unites us with our humanity; loved, forgiven, set free, accepted. It makes possible reconciliation with each other and with God.

Not surprisingly, the redeemed man wanted to follow Jesus. He was sent home to do it, which means, interestingly, that he wasn't going to need a map to get there. It also means that this journey we make towards heaven happens not only in time and space, where maps can guide the way, but it also happens inside us, and among us.

It happens at home, when cloudy things become clear, the despairing things are enlivened with hope, the lost things found, and in ways too numerous to count, and too mysterious to understand, the dead things are brought back to life and health.

[Back](#)[Home](#)