

May 12/24 – Leader’s Guide - Luke 8:26-39 “Freedom from Evil”

Read Luke 8:26-39

1. In his preface to *Screwtape Letters* C.S. Lewis writes – There are two equal and opposite errors when it comes to the devils. The first is to disbelieve in their existence. The second is to believe and to have an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. Discuss.

This is an “icebreaker” type question which will likely bring up to the surface the varying perspectives around the demonic that will be present in your group. This will be helpful knowledge for your facilitation of the discussion. Try to hear from everyone so you are aware of the landscape but seek to press into the heart of the text quickly.

2. What impact does the demonic have on the man? What do you discern is their ultimate goal?

They have robbed him of much that will make for life. He has no clothing, no home, no family – he has been robbed of a sound mind – is living amongst the tombs, keeping company with the dead.

You can see their ultimate goal in what they do once they are in the pigs. The rush down the cliff and drown in the sea. Utter destruction is their goal, to bring us down to death.

Read Acts 16:16-19

3. In the Luke passage we see the city dwellers seeking to manage the demonic on their own. In the Acts passage we see the citizens using the demonic for their benefit. What are some of the ways we may seek to either manage the demonic on our own, or utilize them for our benefit?

I shared in the sermon how we as a pastoral team navigate the personal and relational problems people come to us for assistance in. We address them with Christian formation and Christian counselling. In Christian formation we invite people to deepen in their life of faith, press into spiritual disciplines, repent and step into a new way of being rooted in who they are in Christ. In Christian counselling we invite people to find healing in Jesus through conversation with a trusted individual (pastor, lay pastoral team member, Stephen minister, trained counsellor). Very often these things bear fruit – there is healing, change, and transformation. In a small percentage of situations however these things don’t bear fruit and we prayerfully discern whether or not there is a spiritual underpinning to the

issue that may need to be addressed directly. In those cases a specific time of prayer around such matters is utilized. Pressing a "stuck" person back into Christian formation or counselling without addressing the demonic realities is a way we seek to manage the demonic on our own.

It is a reality that because in our culture we don't acknowledge the demonic there are likely many ways that we seek to "treat" it differently. There is a potential pitfall here in that in the past we spoke of mental health matters as demonic. Jesus however differentiated between the diseased, the depressed, the oppressed. Those struggling with mental health matters would be deeply damaged should we attribute their struggles to the demonic. There is however always the potential that we are treating demonic issues with therapy and medicine when prayer is likely to be most effective – but much wise discernment is needed here.

For the second part of this question, I include an unedited section of the sermon where I touch on this:

Are there ways we hang onto the demonic for our own benefit? Perhaps I could put it this way – so so many of us navigate our lives primarily motivated by either fear or pride – in fear we'll say – I don't want to end up that way – in that place – and that fear drives us – in our mind – to a better place – but in so doing we've given ourselves over to being possessed by fear – a fear that infects every part of our lives – and Jesus comes to us and says – lay down your fear – its doing you no good – my love casts out fear – but we hang on – why? – because we believe the fear is to our benefit – it got us to a better place

Or in pride we say – I don't want to be like those people – I want to be better than those people – and our pride drives our achievement – our success – but in so doing we've given ourselves over to be possessed by pride – wreaking havoc through our relationships – and Jesus comes to us and says – I resist the proud but give grace to the humble – lay down your pride its doing you no good – but we hang on – why? – because we believe the pride is to our benefit – it's gotten us to a better place.

Perhaps another example would help – years ago Laurie and I opened our home to one of the members of our small group – she'd come out of an incredibly abusive situation – our small group loved her – cared for her – became as a new family to her – and motivated by love – and I believe the Spirit – we invited her to find in Jesus healing from that past trauma – she resisted – eventually left the church – we maintained relationship with her – and over the next decade saw this pattern repeat itself over and over again – in light of her story she would immediately be enveloped in deep love and

care – that love eventually motivated others to invite her to healing – she would resist and walk away – we knew her well enough to invite her to see the pattern – wondering aloud if she was remaining in her pain because she believed the pain was giving her more of what she wanted than healing would have – oh yes – she quickly admitted – that’s absolutely what I’m doing – she even herself saw the demonic in it – Jesus was inviting her to healing – but she hang onto the pain for her benefit.

Am I saying that underneath our fear – our pride – our pain is the demonic – of course not – but experience has shown me that the demonic simply latch themselves onto things that are already destroying us – and exacerbate – stir up – aggravate – pour fuel on it – fan it into flame – latch on to such things as fear – pride – anger – lust - unforgiveness – bitterness – control - seeking to convince us that if we were to let such things go we would be in a worse state than we are now – we hang onto such things for our perceived benefit – but it’s only making matters worse – for our utter destruction is their ultimate goal.

4. How is victory over the demonic achieved?

In Jesus. The whole thrust of this passage is that seeing Jesus is what brings about victory over the forces of darkness.

It is striking that Luke doesn’t record the words of command Jesus speaks to the demons. This is likely deliberate for we would be led to think it’s the words spoken, the incantation uttered, that brings freedom. No! It’s Jesus’ person and work that is operative.

5. In the west we have filtered out of our good news proclamation any mention of an enemy – any mention of the demonic. Why have we done this? What is the cost of doing so?

We do this because we are the most materialistic culture at the most materialistic time in human history. There is not a problem we have that we don’t believe we have a solution for, or give us time – science, medicine, technology will give us a solution for them. So the message of this text just seems comical and superstitious.

Those cultures that affirm that we have multidimensional problems find this message of a multidimensional savior is incredibly good news.

Filtering out this aspect of the gospel yes makes it more culturally palpable but as a result we have cut off hope for those who are struggling with

demonic realities. Will we keep it in out of love for those who may be facing such realities?

****If something comes out of your conversation that would be helpful for the staff team to hear – or there is someone in your group struggling with what may be demonic oppression do have them reach out. We do have those within our community with the gifts that can be brought to bear to invite the person into the full freedom we have in Christ.*