

# 12th Sunday of Ordinary Time

19.06.2022  
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## Introduction

How do you nurture the direction of your attention?

Conflict is, among many other things, a demand for attention. And not all conflicts are solved by making everyone happy – if such a thing is even possible. Sometimes a conflict needs to be amplified in order for transformation – or restoration, or reparation – to take place.

In today's gospel we read how Jesus' attention was always a subtle thing: listening to what was on the surface of the day, but also listening to what was underneath. His was a life attuned to a subtle attention-giving, one that – he hoped – would support communities in their pursuit of hospitality, a practice of power that was equitable, and pathways out from under the rule of fear.

As you prepare for this week's text, it may be that you wish to consider when, in your work, or home, or relationships, you find it easy to give generous and multilayered attention, and when it is that you find that more difficult.

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## Text

### Luke 8:26–39

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"—for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 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.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at

the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 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." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

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## Comment

From the time of Jesus' proclamation of his purpose – The Spirit of the Lord is upon me! – (Luke 4:16–19) up until he "set his face to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51), there is an exhilarating, and exhausting sequence of miracles, cures, declarations, responses, impromptu gatherings, healings and public events. This Galilee ministry is characterised mostly by positive responses from the crowds – whether Jews or Gentiles – and a sense of festival. The text he'd read at the beginning of this period is holding true: *He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

Luke's gospel is one of balance though: every silver lining has a cloud: the proclamation of the ministry had followed on the heels of the temptation in the desert; the Galilee ministry is followed by the slow road to Jerusalem, where empire flexes its muscles and executes Jesus. This tragedy, though, is followed by a story of two disciples who walk to Emmaus and along the way meet a stranger who makes them see their own past in new ways.

For Luke, no single story – whether beautiful or burdensome – is the whole story.

Today's text comes towards the end of that joyous period of time in and around Galilee. Luke shows Jesus' universal message and appeal by having him go over to Gerasenes "opposite Galilee" – meaning over the lake. Even here, in a place overrun by Roman soldiers, a place replete with the vocabulary of empire (*legion* particularly coming from the battalions of Roman soldiers, who marched under the banner of the *swine* to that region), and a place also replete with fear.

The man – we never know his name – lives in the places of the dead and is unclothed. He seems so far removed from his own self that he is living on the edges of the town, perhaps made into some kind of bogeyman. When he is healed – the poor pigs – the swineherds run to the town and tell the townspeople who come to investigate, and when they see their compatriot restored to himself, they are afraid. Why would they be afraid? Surely for one of their own to be restored to his own personhood would be a cause of joy not a cause of fear.

There are many ways into their fear. Perhaps they had treated him poorly while he was so distressed, and now – restored – he would have the memory of their own hostility to hold against them. This might explain why he was so keen to leave with Jesus, and why Jesus was so keen to have him stay with his people.

Perhaps his restoration was simply an interruption into a life that was under the thumb of the Romans: and any change to the way things were, particularly by an upstart from across the lake, could cause the occupying army to double their oppression. Perhaps they simply didn't comprehend what had happened to their countryman, and their fear in the face of this drew more of their attention than their compassion and hospitality toward their brother did.

In all of this, we see a device of Luke's gospel: pay attention to who is directing your attention. Even joy can be a distraction, and certainly oppression is. There is always something that needs your attention more than just the loudest voice. There may be a still small voice that requires your devotion. However, just because a voice is quiet, it doesn't mean it's pointing you in the right direction. What's needed is multilayered discernment.

When it comes to practicing conflict transformation, it is always important to ask

the questions about what voices are being heeded, and followed. Is it the most threatening voice that's dictating the terms of peace? Or is it the voice that's passively manipulating a group? Is it a quiet voice that's calling you to the long work of transformation? Or a loud voice that is an amplified cry for justice?

Of all of the many things to be said about Jesus of Nazareth, one of them is that he was profoundly attentive. He listened, and in listening, he made decisions about which voices to heed and which to resist. Even here, he heeds the community asking him to leave, and he ignores the man whose cause would seem to be most understandable. He wishes, it seems, to leave the community with a disruption among them, one that might be complicated, but one that will call their attention towards what might save them.

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## Response

In any group of people there will be stories of people who wish to be heard, stories of being heard, or being quietened. In the same group, there will be stories of paying attention, or denying attention.

In whatever group you're part of, consider asking people to share stories of listening and being listened to, of ignoring pleas for attention, or attending to them, uncovering the stories of importance present and alive in your group.

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## Prayer

Watchful Jesus,  
when you paid attention to a community  
you saw what was on the surface  
and what was beneath:  
the exclusions, the desires, the occupations,  
the potentials.  
Help us learn to see like you did  
noticing what will have the quality of transformation  
avoiding the distraction of what will only distract.  
Because when you did this,  
even fear was lessened.  
Amen.