

I wonder how many of you like horror films. Films like Night of the Living Dead, the Exorcist and The Graveyard. I am one of those people who don't like them at all. That's because they frighten me and it probably all stems back to when I was a child and was visiting a grave yard with my parents. Whose grave we were visiting has long gone from my memory, but the words spoken are indelibly inked on my heart.

Be careful where you put your feet, I was told; don't tread on a grave or you might disturb the corpse and the bogeyman might get you.

I can laugh about it now but I had a great fear of graveyards as those words haunted me for many years. .

Hence I still don't like those sorts of horror films. It's funny what scares us in life. This story of the Gesarene demoniac itself begins in a graveyard. A lunatic figure racing naked among all those dead people, accompanied by the sound of clanking chains, might be a frightening thought. Add some eerie music and you might get another cult classic block buster. But that is not the scary part of the story; that comes later. So let's take a look at this demoniac man.

For years he haunted the tombs. He was a living person dwelling in the places of the dead. He might as well be dead himself. No one remembers his name; they can barely register that he is a human being,

Crazy, they call him. Reduced to an ailment and haunted by demons. So he wanders the tombs, naked, alone, neglected, ashamed, forgotten, and afraid; Never knowing peace, never knowing human decency, never knowing love, feeling permanently miserable; he is entombed and tied down by his mental illness, by social neglect, indifference, he is dead to any sense of real living.

But he is a person. Once he knew what love was and what compassion looked like. Once he knew what companionship and hope felt like, but now he doesn't recognise his own name.

Legion, he calls himself, because so many problems and illnesses have taken up residence in him that Legion is all he knows. He knows that the people of the town fear him and yet they are intrigued by this spectre that runs around naked, chatting to himself. He knows his place and the people of the town are happy to remind him where he belongs. He has become commonplace, routine, a part of the scenery.

Then along comes Jesus and he simply tells the demons to leave the man.

His question to Jesus "What do you want of me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God. I beg you do not torment me."

Even with a legion of voices in his head, he recognises Jesus, he recognises new life. No longer is he Legion, he is seen and loved as a child of God.

What happens next is a bit humorous really. Legion apparently recognises that their days of plaguing this man are over, and they ask Jesus not to send them off into the nothingness of the abyss. A herd of pigs are on the hillside nearby, and they ask to enter these. Jesus gives his permission, only once in that herd of swine, the legion races down to the sea and drowns. It's sort of a bit strange but the end of the legion.

Anyway, here comes the real scary bit. The townspeople arrive. They've known this once crazy, but now sane man since his birth. They've witnessed his wild episodes, tried to chain him down to keep him from hurting himself and others. Then they see he is set free from those demons that have plagued his life for far too long.

You'd think they'd be overjoyed. He's been healed, made whole. But no, the scripture says they are instead **seized with great fear.** They ask Jesus to leave and he does.

I've often wondered what those people were so afraid of. Perhaps it is the fact that their own demons would come to the forefront now instead of pointing the finger at their once demonic man.

As I've said before, it's funny what frightens us in life. I know of some of the things that frighten me; and I'm not talking about scary movies now; but how do we react to racism, alcoholism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia?

Jesus calls us to new life and we must not be complacent by becoming overly comfortable and familiar. What fear is holding us back from welcoming Jesus fully into our lives, into our church and trusting him to relieve us of our demons.

If we are honest with ourselves, we have all spent time in the tombs, the tombs of anger, loneliness, loss, despair and mourning – and now we live in our right minds: Which means we have Good News to share, because like the former demoniac, we can tell of Jesus' healing in our lives. We can tell the stories of renewal and transformation that brought us to this new day. We can tell the wonder working power of a God who will not ever let us go, who seeks us even when we can't recognise that we are lost.

When we are ready, willing and able to hear Jesus' invitation, then we the church will experience new life, new hope, and new inspiration. We must be willing to be bold enough to leave the past behind, to leave the tombs and loose the shackles that keep us tied and tethered and to do the same for others.

The problem with being heled and made new is that the familiar ways of doing and being will no longer apply.

But that is Good News.

When we experience the joy of being healed and made whole, the only response we can give is to proclaim what God is doing

and has done for us.

With parables left and right, Jesus sought to open the door of the human heart to God's kingdom. He came knocking, knowing the door will be opened. He came seeking us, knowing he would find us. He came asking, knowing his open arms would receive us. He still comes, across the sea of history to the here and now, to where we are. As he himself as laid to rest in a graveyard long ago, then opened it wide when he rose from death, so now we are empowered to rise, not only from death on the last day, but also from that which tries to hold us down, be it "demons" or "sin" or "fear".

In Christ Jesus, graveyards are no longer scary places!

This story has a wonderful ending. As Jesus and his disciples are casting off for the other side of the lake, having been asked to leave by the townsfolk, this healed man begs to go with him. But Jesus instead encourages him to go home and tell what God has done for him. And that's just what he did.

After the demons have gone you can't help but tell of God's goodness and mercy, Amen