

Trinity 1: Luke 8:26-39

May these words I preach be acceptable to you our lord and Father. Amen

So how strong is your Will? Are you given to giving in to temptation?

Just one more glass of wine; one more cream cake; I will stop smoking tomorrow; I'll give up going to the gym because I have become obsessed with exercise - the list is endless of the temptations we all at some time or other have faced, maybe still are struggling with something or other. Some greater than I have mentioned above.

So here we see a man who has been taken over completely by his demons. It doesn't actually tell us what they are, but he was so tormented by them that it had caused him to break free of the shackles that the people of the town had bound him with and flee to the hills and live a very solitary life even naked.

It's as if even clothes added to his demonic behaviour.

Yet somewhere deep inside of this poor wretched man was a person wanting to be free of the many demons that had brought him to this living death. To live such a solitary life was also a torment in itself - even animals live in packs. Did this man realise his demons were so bad he needed to keep out of everyone's way - or was it his own self destruction? We will never know because it doesn't actually tell us what the demons he was battling were.

But when Jesus appears the demons instantly recognise him as the son of the most high God - they speak through the man begging him not to torture them. But Jesus doesn't wait to see if the man asks for healing. Jesus acts fast as he sees these demons seizing the man, they are so scared of him.

The man somehow manages to throw himself at Jesus's feet despite these demons screaming out and trying to pull the man back, because it means they are being subjected to the power of Jesus and that can only mean they are now going to be tortured.

Jesus by his grace knows this man can't help himself, so he asks the man his name. When the man replies, "Legion", he himself suddenly becomes aware of the many demons that had possessed him.

Jesus sees this and commands the demons to come out of this man and he sends them into a herd of pigs as the demons requested, who immediately run into the lake and drown.

The Man is cured. He gets dressed and sits at Jesus feet. He wants to stay with Jesus, but Jesus tells him to go home and tell all the others who had just cured him .

The town folk never praised Jesus, for they were afraid. Who was this man that even evil spirits obeyed him?

But Jesus was also teaching them a lesson by driving the pigs into the lake, like they had driven this man out of town, subjecting him to a self-destructive solitary way of life. Pigs in those days would have been a good way of life; something to be sold, and eaten, to show they were good people with a good living. By losing them to the lake, set as an example of just what this man had lost, so they became afraid of Jesus and asked him to leave. So Jesus got into the boat and left. They had now become aware of the demons in their own lives .

At the beginning I asked you to look at your own temptations as I believe we are tempted every day. Of course, some temptations become addictive and it's when this starts to take over your life and destroy your life and the lives of people around you, that's when we are fully known as an addict. We of course today put labels on things like drug abuse, an alcoholic, or eating disorders or lots more I am sure you can name.

But how many of us will acknowledge the fact that our own temptations could lead us into addiction that we wouldn't be able to break free from, or that we can suddenly become so ill by something that has happened in our lives that we shut ourselves off? Mental ill-health can flare up in any of us at different times throughout our lives and if we don't seek help it can become self-destructive.

Jesus is there still, he is in the Drs and nurses, ready to listen, to get you the right medications, even hear your confession of your own self-loathing. Jesus wants to help you and he wants us to look out for others who may need help too.

Jesu gave up his life for us all, even the man that had been full of demons, for he knows our every waking thought. He has seen it all, he knows every fear and anxiety we go through with our disorders. He tells us "do not be afraid" for he has given us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control, and even an addict tries to control their life by using their wits to obtain what they need to feed their habit or to try and get people to understand the confusion of their mind. They try to get free. Try at first to help themselves, they may seek help.

So with the right kind of help, for their particular disorders, many do go onto to recover and make a new start in life given the support and the right encouragements to move forward again.

Sadly some relapse again and again.

Jesus wasn't put off by the man. He saw the man was deeply distressed. He saw that although he couldn't seem to find the strength to fight off these demons that possessed him, he did

recognise the power given to Jesus. So, with what must have been the last bit of self will the man had, he threw himself at the mercy of God. Jesus saw this, so as the demons were screaming out seizing the man they begged to go into the pigs, Jesus acted fast and cast them out and granted them to enter the pigs, whereby the pigs just ran straight into the lake and drowned.

Today I can imagine all sorts of cries from animal welfare groups about this, but it was the demons themselves who begged to go into the pigs. Maybe now they knew that the power of Jesus would take away the weakness of the man, meaning they too would lose their power and strength with which they fed upon from the man. As he grew stronger, they would fail. No one else in that town had succumbed to them. They knew they were losing their power to one greater than them.

So instead of being tortured slowly as the man recovered, they recognise Jesus has the power over all evils and has the power to cast them out.

They chose the pigs and the pigs once filled with the evil spirits fled into the river and drowned. The demons wouldn't have seen this coming - all they saw was a way of carrying on their evil ways - but the pigs just bolted as animals do when afraid; and now filled with evil spirits, so with the last of their strength ran into the lake.

Jesus saved the man. He was showing that he has the power over satan, by casting out the demons and by granting their request.

The herdsmen would have raced into town telling all that they had seen; mainly about the man that was now clean and cured by this man Jesus.

Jesus knows the town folks are afraid by what they have heard and order him to leave. So Jesus just got into the boat and left .

So isn't that the way it still is today? Many people are afraid of Jesus, afraid to put their full trust in him. They don't understand this power he has over everything, so it's easier to turn away and feel they are in charge of our own lives. The people with a disorder were once just like us, able to turn away from the things that they knew could get them addicted, but had to try it anyway, only to let it take over every aspect of life as they knew it .

They are no longer in control of the very thing keeping them, making them believe they could stop at any moment - self-deception and destruction. But while some manage to receive help, others find the grip so tight and the only salvation and peace comes is when death takes them.

Jesus knows us. He knows what's in our hearts and minds. He knows when we have cried out. He also knows when we are afraid and can't fight any more. He will have seen the struggle this

person has had every day of their life. He will have seen how they have tried to beat this thing that grips them.

These are the very same people he came to save.

He is much more powerful than satan, but he does know about temptations as he himself was tormented in the wilderness at a most vulnerable time in his life too.

So think again about your temptations, and thank God that you find the strength to resist. But if all you can do is pray for someone you may know, who has some kind of life debilitating disorder of any kind, then please continue to pray. We never know what God hears or takes from our prayers.

To quote Oscar Wilde

I can resist everything except temptation itself.

Amen.