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Father's Day, June 20, 2010

Sermon Texts: Luke 8: 26-39

Sermon Title: "The Master meets the Madman"

Sermon Topic: Witnessing Where You Are

Sermon Purpose: To teach that you don't have to travel to some far off land to witness to God's love or to Christ's presence and power in human life.

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Sermon Prayer: God, Whose love reigns supreme in the world; mediate Your message to us this hour; that we may know Your will and be able to love You with our whole heart, mind, and strength; through Christ, Who intercedes on our behalf and Who bestows upon us His marvelous grace. Amen.

The Jewish Talmud lists four characteristics of madness / insanity:

1. Walking out of doors, alone at night
2. Spending the night in a cemetery
3. Tearing one's clothes, and
4. Destructive tendencies toward oneself.

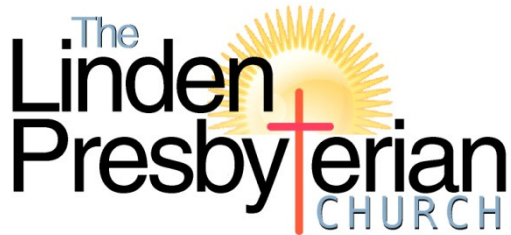
According to Luke, the fellow in this morning's Gospel Lesson exhibited all four characteristics. There was no doubt. He **was** a madman, a "Demonic," a man whose life had been taken over by forces and powers his contemporaries could neither understand nor control. They had **tried** to subdue him. When he first exhibited these symptoms, they put iron manacles on his hands and feet. They restrained him with chains. But the forces within him were so powerful that he **broke** the chains, **smashed** the irons, and ran away to wander among the burial caves and through the hills. He was both a **frightened** and a **frightening** character. He ran around **naked** and **bleeding** from self-inflicted wounds. And his tormented screams were often heard **echoing** through the canyons that bordered the Sea of Galilee.

His friends, family, and community had **given up** on him, long ago. They simply couldn't **handle** him. So, they did their best to **ignore** him, leaving him alone in his **madness**; alone in his **agony**.

Looking closer at this fellow's encounter with the Master, we'll notice two things: Jesus' response to the Madman, and the response of the madman to his healing, liberating encounter with the Master.

First, remember: to look at the Master is to see God in the flesh. To hear **Jesus** speak is to hear **God** speak. To see Jesus in action is to see **God** in action. To see the way Jesus relates to people is to see the way **God** relates to people ... people like you and me.





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In this encounter with the Madman Jesus shows us at least **three** characteristics of **His** personality.

Jesus was **courageous** to risk helping the Madman. Others had chosen to stay away from him. After all, he was so **strong** he could easily have snapped another person's neck. He was so **unpredictable** that no one knew what his next move might be. And he was so **strange!** Usually when the Madman approached a crowd, everyone **scattered**. I'm sure there were probably times when some local "bullies" would, occasionally, chase after him with clubs and torment the already beleaguered soul in some sort of cruel "sport."

And I suspect that when the Madman approached Jesus and the crowd that day, everyone scattered – everyone, that is, **except** the Master. Jesus held His ground and stayed put! Vulnerable as He was in the face of the Madman's strength, Jesus held His ground! He was willing to risk Himself in order to help another human being.

That shouldn't be surprising to anyone who claims a faith in Christ! When God became human, He took a risk. He exposed Himself to danger; and He became vulnerable – as vulnerable as a newborn baby, opening Himself to the possibility of being **wounded** – and even **killed**. And He did it because He **loves** us! He loved that Madman and He loves you and me. He was, and is, and forever **will** be willing to risk Himself for our sakes.

Someone has said that the idea that God loves the whole world is a thrilling and magnificent idea. But I say to you that the **greatest idea of all** is that God is able to focus all of His **compassion**, all of His **love**, and all of His **attention** on one solitary human being. When the Master dealt with the Madman, He gave him His **undivided** attention. He wasn't distracted even for a **second!** He focused all of His love, concern, and power on that one solitary man and on his need.

John 3: 16 says **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."** Now, that's an awesome, incredible, and thrilling thought, isn't it? The concern of God is **global**. God loves the whole **world**: every nation, every race, and every person! But there are times when **we** need to replace the word "world" in John 3:16 with our **own** name. And, I need to hear: "For God so loved Bill Weaver that he gave His only begotten Son." Before I can move beyond myself to be concerned about **others** and about God's **world**, I need to experience God focusing all of His love, all of His attention, and all of His power on **me**, ministering just to **my** need. And that experience always frees and empowers me to be a man for others: to be the husband my wife needs, the father my children need, the grandfather and the son I am needed to be, the pastor my congregation needs, and the concerned Christian brother the hurting multitudes of our world need.

Before this demoniac of our Gospel Lesson could become a person for **others**, he needed this private moment with the Master. And the **same** is true for you and me. **Each** of us needs that private moment when God becomes more than just another **word** to us and God's love becomes **real**; something we have experienced on a deeply **personal** level. And each of us needs that private moment when we meet with the Master in prayer and encounter the Master through His Word – when we give up our doubts, hand over our worries, and cast aside all those things that clutter our lives and **keep us** from being channels of God's love to others.





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Our Lord's encounter with the Madman reveals to us that the Master is available for those private moments ... available to focus **all** of His love, attention, and power on me and on **my** need, as well as on **you** and on **your** need. And that's the most **thrilling** thought of all!

The Madman came to Jesus in pretty desperate shape. I can picture him: his hair and beard were long and straggly; his body was scarred and had open sores from some self-inflicted wounds and from injuries caused by the neighborhood brutes and bullies. And there was probably a repulsive odor around him because personal hygiene was not one of his priorities. By the time Jesus finished with this fellow – and his neighbors arrived to see what had happened – “the man whom neither chains nor men could hold was sitting in a calm and quiet manner before the Master; he who had terrified others as he ran naked among the tombs was now clean and clothed; the one who had shrieked wildly and behaved strangely was now fully recovered.”¹

You see, a genuine encounter with the Master always has a transforming effect upon our lives. You can't experience the overwhelming love of God demonstrated in Christ Jesus and simply walk away from the experience untouched or unchanged.

And now, as Paul Harvey would say, “the rest of the story!” Having been touched and transformed by Jesus, the **former** “Demonic” wanted to go wherever Jesus was going. He wanted to **stay** with Jesus. His heart was filled with gratitude and he wanted to express that gratitude by staying with Jesus to serve and to worship Him.

But Jesus had a **different** idea. “Return home,” Jesus said to him, “and tell how much God has done for you.” Spread the news! Share your story! Express your joy! And tell all who listen that **God** did it! But, notice how this man reacted. Instead of telling everyone what **God** had done for him, he spread the story of what **Jesus** had done for him.

That's **our** assignment, too! Go tell your story. Tell everyone who will listen what God - through Jesus Christ - has done for you. Share it with these children as they grow, with the stranger who comes to your door, with the neighbor who may be as needy of spiritual assurance and strength as the Madman in the tombs. **Because** the message comes from people like you and me, common people who make **no** claim to sainthood, people who may have experienced some parts of things in our lives that do **not** make us proud, it will be heard as **truth** – and it will give **hope** to the **world**. Amen!

¹ *Commentary on Mark*, William Lane, Eerdmans 1974, p. 187.