

Luke 8:22-56: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 14 May 2020

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 8 verses 22 to 56. He said to them, Where is your faith?

And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him? Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.

When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, What have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.

For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For many a time 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 desert.

[1 : 22] Jesus then asked him, What is your name? And he said, Legion. For many demons had entered him, and they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.

Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and 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. And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from 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.

[2 : 30] And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue.

And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying. As Jesus went, the people pressed around him.

And there was a woman who had a discharge of blood for twelve years. And though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment.

And immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, Who was it that touched me? When all denied it, Peter said, Master, the crowd surround you and are pressing in on you.

But Jesus said, Someone touched me. For I perceive that power has gone out from me. And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.

[3 : 35] And he said to her, Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, Your daughter is dead.

Do not trouble the teacher any more. But Jesus, on hearing this, answered him, Do not fear, only believe, and she will be well. And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child.

And all were weeping and mourning for her. But he said, Do not weep, for she is not dead, but sleeping. And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But taking her by the hand, he called, saying, Child, arise.

And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed, and he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

In Luke chapter 8, Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples, and goes out to sea. This is a story that might, to some degree, remind us of the story of Jonah. Jesus is asleep in the boat, like Jonah was asleep in the boat.

[4 : 42] He's going to a realm associated with Gentiles. A great storm arises. Frightened sailors wake the sleeping character. There's a miraculous stilling of the storm, as a result of some action by the main character, and then the sailors marvel.

Here, however, Jesus is not thrown like Jonah into the water. Rather, he is the one who calms the storm through his word. There's a reversal as well.

Jesus rises, and the storm sleeps. He rebukes the wind and the waves, much as he rebukes demons on other occasions. Perhaps we should see some connection between this story and the story of the resurrection.

Jesus is asleep in death. Jesus rises up and stills the power of death itself. Jesus is in control of the situation, even though he seems to be completely out of control and disconnected in sleep.

In this story, then, we probably have a sign of what is yet to come. They go to the realm of the Gerasenes. It's a Gentile region. There, Jesus encounters things associated with great impurity, demonic possession, tombs, and pigs.

[5 : 46] And there's an extensive description of the demon-possessed man. They try to bind this man, and they can't bind him. Jesus is the one who ultimately will bind the strong man, Satan himself, one whose power is manifested in this demon-possessed man.

The demons address Jesus as the eschatological judge. He's the son of God who will condemn them to their ultimate fate. They do not want to be sent into the abyss. And perhaps this is an attempt to counter Jesus' power by naming him in some magical way.

Jesus then counters by asking the demon what its name is. It declares itself to be legion, referring to a number, a huge demonic force. Legion also reminds us of the Roman military forces that would be associated with their legions.

Another interesting detail that might help us to read this passage better is to recognise that the wild boar was the symbol of the Roman legion in Palestine. The demons beg him to send them into the pigs.

And entering the pigs, the demons don't seem to be able to prevent the pigs from rushing down, careering towards destruction in the waters. The herd is drowned in the waters. The legion is drowned in the waters.

[6 : 56] Like Pharaoh's army was drowned at the Red Sea. Jesus is the son of God who binds the strong man here. When news of this great exorcism reaches the people of the region, they beg Jesus to depart from them.

The begging of the demons and the begging of the garrisons seem to be connected with each other. There is most likely something else going on here, and it seems to be the reversal of the scapegoat motif. When you usually have a scapegoat, it's one or two people that are cast out from a city in order to establish peace by projecting conflict onto a single or a small group of enemies.

Here, however, it is the multitude of the demons that go into the sea, and the one man who is saved. Jesus, however, is then called to go away. He is the one who has unsettled the social order.

And the association of the begging multitude of the demons with the begging multitude of the people of the garrisons suggests maybe something more of what's going on here. As long as all the demons were entering this demoniac, the garrisons were dealing with their demons.

But as soon as the demoniac is freed, they lose the lightning rod for their demons. Similar patterns can be seen in many societies. It is not uncommon to see in a family that there is one member onto which all the dysfunctions of the family are projected.

[8 : 11] And if that member is ever released from their dysfunctions, the whole family is thrown into chaos. When they no longer have a particular member onto which to project their demons, they each have to deal with their demons themselves.

And that is a crisis. Perhaps something similar is happening with the garrisons. They also seem to be afraid of Christ. Christ has bound the strong man. But they do not want this power near at hand.

They felt that they could manage the power of the demons. But they cannot manage the power of Christ. Many people would prefer to manage evil powers than be subject to a good power. However, the demoniac is filled with thankfulness and he wants to go and join Jesus on his mission.

Jesus, however, sends him back to his people to tell them how much God has done for him. And he goes around telling them how much Jesus has done for him. The shift there should not go unnoticed.

After returning from the land of the Gerasenes, Jesus performs two entangled acts of healing. Both of the people being healed are women and both of them are connected with the number 12.

[9 : 14] The woman with the discharge of blood has suffered from it for 12 years and the daughter of Jairus was 12 years of age. Jairus was one of the rulers of the synagogue. He would have led services and other things like that.

That Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue illumines the fact that opposition to Jesus among the religious leaders of Israel was far from total and complete. Jesus is requested to lay his hand on Jairus' daughter and to heal her and he goes with Jairus.

But on the way, he's thronged by the crowd and the woman with the discharge of blood comes up and touches his garment. What she has is presumably a chronic hemorrhaging of blood rather than just abnormally severe menstruation.

She has spent all of her living upon physicians and we should bear in mind that Luke is the one who's writing this, a physician himself. The effect of this would have been to render her permanently unclean.

It's probably one of the reasons why she approaches Jesus in the way that she did. If she had been more open in her approach, she would probably not have been able to approach him at all. Many doctors have tried to help her and they had just increased her suffering and consumed her resources.

[10 : 21] And Jesus' healing then contrasts with the failure of all of the experts. She had heard about Jesus and we should consider the fact that she was probably confined to the margins of society by her condition.

She was in many respects someone from an utterly different station in life from Jairus. She believes that if she were just to touch Jesus' garments she would be healed. There's similar beliefs in Acts 5.15 and 19.12.

Such a touch would be defiling even if it would not be as defiling as touching someone's flesh. A defiled person would have to wash themselves and also wash their clothes.

But here, the transmission goes in the other direction. Rather than impurity being transmitted, cleansing is transmitted. There's a life that overcomes impurity. And the woman with the issue of blood is healed by the man with the issue of life.

To his disciples' amazement, Jesus inquires who touched him. Jesus recognises what has happened. And in calling for the person who touched him to make herself known, the stage is set for an act of recognition, blessing and inclusion that completes the healing.

[11 : 31] She has been excluded on account of her condition. And in publicly bringing her to light, Jesus is including her once again. You can see a similar thing in the story of the woman who washes his feet.

Her exclusion is challenged by Jesus' statement concerning her that she is forgiven. The intent, then, is not only that she should be healed of her physical condition, but that she should be included once more.

When the woman reveals herself, she comes in fear and trembling and falls down before him. This is a response not unlike that which we see when God appears to people in scripture. She tells him everything.

And Jesus blesses her and addresses her as daughter, telling her that her faith has made her well. Faith here is not intellectual belief so much as confident and daring trust.

The prominence of faith in this story, as in that of Jairus that continues after it, should also be related to the language of salvation that occurs in both. The salvation seems to refer to physical healing, and the language of faith could be interpreted narrowly too.

[12 : 31] But Jesus routinely connects physical and spiritual senses of these things. Faith is a practical confidence to look to Jesus for deliverance, not just in spiritual matters.

And our tidy divisions between physical and spiritual can prevent us from understanding this point. As in the story of Jairus' daughter that follows this, early Christian readers probably placed themselves in the position of the woman with the discharge of blood, recognising her experience as a model of Christian experience more generally.

And we should do this too. Her being addressed as daughter at the end might also remind the reader of the new family that Jesus is forming around himself. But all of this creates a delay.

And by the time that Jesus reaches the house of Jairus, Jairus' daughter is dead, the feared crisis has hit, and there might seem to be nothing more to be done. Jesus, however, calls Jairus to keep his confidence in his sufficiency for the situation.

There are many similarities to be observed between this story and the story of Lazarus in John chapter 11. Encountering the mourners, telling them that the dead person is sleeping, delaying until the person is dead.

[13:39] Jesus performs this miracle with only Peter, James, and John of his disciples present. They are privileged witnesses to his power, his power over death itself. And saying that the daughter was sleeping would make people think of the resurrection, when those sleeping in the graves would be awakened.

But this was a long-distant hope for the end of all things. It wasn't really something that could address the immediacy of the grief that they felt right now. But Jesus can refer to death this way as sleeping, because in him the resurrection and the life had entered into Jairus' house.

He is the one who can awake people from death itself. Jesus takes the girl by the hand and addresses her, telling her to arise. The reference to arising naturally and appropriately, I think, makes us think of resurrection.

Perhaps giving her something to eat is also in part to make us think of the later proofs of Jesus' own resurrection given in taking food. It's not merely for the girl's recovery of strength.

Jesus once again strictly instructs those present to keep the raising of the girl a secret, although the fact that he takes Peter, James, and John with him makes clear that he wanted the event to be witnessed and later spoken of openly.

[14 : 51] However, to tell it yet before Jesus' own resurrection had disclosed his true power over death would be premature. A question to consider.

How might we fill out further the connection between the woman with the issue of blood and Jairus' daughter and Israel as a nation?

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