

Responding to Fear

Consider this modern retelling of the healing of the demon-possessed man:

Once there was a wealthy young man who lived in a great, elaborate house with dozens of rooms. Each room was more comfortable and more beautiful than the one before it. One day, he decided to ask the Lord to come and stay with him. When the Lord arrived, this young man offered Him the very best room in the house. The room was upstairs and at the end of the hall. "This room is yours, Jesus, stay as long as you like and you can do whatever you want in this room. Remember Jesus, it's all yours." "Thank you," the Lord replied, and with that the man shut the door and went about his business.

That evening, after he had retired for the night, there came a loud knocking at the front door. The young man pulled on his robe and made his way downstairs. When he opened the door, he found that the Devil had sent three of his demons to attack him! He quickly tried to close the door but one of the demons kept sticking his foot in the door. Sometime later, after a great struggle, he managed to slam the door shut and returned to his room totally exhausted. "Can you believe that," the young man thought. "Jesus is upstairs in my very best room sleeping while I'm down here battling demons. Oh well, maybe He just didn't hear. The young man slept fitfully that night.

The next day, things went along as normal and, being as tired as he was, the young man retired early that evening. Along about midnight there came such a terrible ruckus at the front door that the young man was sure that whatever it was would tear the door down. He stumbled down the stairs once again and opened the door to find that were dozens of demons now trying to get into his beautiful home. For more than 3 hours he fought and struggled against the demons from hell and

finally overtook them enough to shut the door against their attack. All energy seemed to fail him. "I really don't understand this at all. Why won't the Lord come to my rescue? Why does he allow me to fight all by myself? I feel so alone." Troubled, he found his way to the sofa and fell into a restless sleep.

The next morning, he decided to inquire of the Lord about the happenings of the last two evenings. Quietly, he made his way to the elegant bedroom where he had left Jesus. "Jesus" he called as he tapped at the door. "Lord, I don't understand what is happening. For the last two nights I have had to fight the demons away from my door while you were sleeping. Don't you care about me? Did I not give you the very best room in my house?" He could see the tears building in Jesus' eyes but continued on. "I just don't understand. I really thought that once I invited you to live with me, that you would take care of me, and I gave you the best room in my house and everything. What more can I do?"

"My precious child," Jesus spoke softly, "I do love and care for you. I protect all that you have released into my care. But when you invited me to come here and stay, you brought me to this lovely room and you shut the door to the rest of the house. I am Lord of this room, but I am not Master of this house. I have protected this room and no demon may enter here."

"Oh Lord, please forgive me. Take all of my house, it is yours! I am so sorry that I never offered you all to begin with. I want you to have control of everything!" With this he flung open the bedroom door and knelt at Jesus' feet. "Please forgive me Lord for being so selfish" he begged. Jesus smiled and told him that He had already forgiven him and that He would take care of things from now on.

Along about midnight the banging on the door was frightening. The young man slipped out of his room in time to see Jesus going down the stairs. He watched in awe as Jesus swung open the door. Satan stood at the door demanding to be let in.

"What do you want, Satan?" the Lord asked. The devil bowed low in the presence of the Lord. "So sorry, I seem to have gotten the wrong address." With that, he and the demons all ran away. (from *Fear and Surrender* by Tim Zingale on Sermon Central)

In his first inaugural address in 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt spoke those immortalized words: "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." This attitude about fear is from a concept from the age of modernity that believes that whatever a person can overcome anything by obtaining the necessary knowledge, or sometimes merely by sheer will power. However, we know that while this is a good saying to help rally people to commit to a common cause, as Roosevelt did, fear is something that is not that simple. Between the story we just heard, the healing of the man possessed with the demons from the Gospel reading, we see at least three different faces of fear.

The story of the young man had two fears: one of the demons themselves and the other of losing control if he surrendered everything to Jesus. While the wild man in the Gospel reading was possessed, the people feared for their safety which would be why they tried to keep him in chains. To a certain extent, they were able to control the demons, or at least keep track of them. While their fear was not eliminated totally, they had a certain level of security by knowing where the demons were, living in a quasi-peaceful coexistence. By driving the demons from the man, Jesus demonstrated power over the demons, especially when the pigs went over the cliff and into the place where the demons did not want to go. The people realized that the power Jesus had was far greater than the demons' power. Based on their semi-successful attempts at controlling the demons, they realized that they would not be able to control Jesus.

While fear can take many forms, fear in and of itself is not good or bad. What is good or bad is the response to the fear that we have. The wealthy young man and

the townspeople at Gerasene had two possible responses with respect to Jesus - either try to keep Jesus under control; or surrender all that they had to Jesus and trust Him to deal with the demons.

We also have the choice of these two responses when we are confronted by Jesus or even the demons that torment us. One choice we have is we can try to contain or control Jesus, putting limits what He can do. The other choice is to react out of reverential awe, acknowledging His power and surrendering ourselves to Him.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: https://youtu.be/hhR8HV_NrNk

Service: <https://youtu.be/1fbh5xqTrBY>