

### **Sermon on Luke 8:26-39**

For six years, Maverick Henry Arrowood lived in a tent just beyond Milt Zernechel's property just south of Mankato. Whenever he saw him, Zernechel would honk his horn at him, and every time, Arrowood would keep his head down, not acknowledging the gesture. Eventually, his granddaughter questioned why he was fighting a losing battle. "She'd say, 'Don't waste the honk, Grandpa,'" Zernechel said. But he persisted in trying to get through to this man who lived in the woods and seemed to reject modern society. He kept honking, tried to talk to him whenever he could. But he never really got to know the mystery man.

Arrowood was known to law enforcement for a handful of minor infractions that mostly included sifting through trash containers for items he could resell. He supposedly spent much of his time collecting aluminum cans. He'd been arrested several times, including one case in which he is said to have threatened a Waste Management worker. That case ultimately resulted in no conviction.

Zernechel, authorities say, is one of the few people who ever really communicated with Arrowood. Zernechel said he and his wife had tried to help him over the years. They once offered him a gift card to Wal-Mart so Arrowood could get some boots. But he refused, saying he was down on society.

Dental records were used to identify Arrowood, said Rich Murry of the Blue Earth County Sheriff's Department. Murry also said authorities have been unable to locate Arrowood's family, and that Arrowood and several of his siblings may have been removed from their parents' custody years ago. For that reason, he said, they've struggled to find any of his family.

As Jesus stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"—for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times 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 wilds.) Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” The man replied, “Legion”; for many demons had entered the man. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Seeing a large swineherd on the hillside Jesus let the demons enter the herd. They came out of the man, entered the swine and drove them down the bank and into the lake where they were drowned. When the people watching the swine saw this they ran off and told everyone they could what had happened. People started to come out and see for themselves. What they found was Jesus and the previously possessed man sitting by him and in his right mind. And they were afraid! They were so afraid that they asked Jesus to leave right then and there!

I don't know what demons occupied Maverick Arrowood, but like the man in today's Gospel reading it's sad that he too has no identity left except for what he is captive to. At the heart of both of these stories is identity—the man's, Maverick's and ours. It's so sad that when asked his name the man in the gospel story says, “Legion, for we are many.” Not Jacob, Isaac, or Joshua, but Legion. Likewise we have no idea about what defines Maverick, who his family is, what forces shaped his life. He's just the guy who lived in the tent in the woods shunning society. Both are identified by what hindered them and kept them bound, by all those things that kept them from living life in its abundance.

But are we that much different? Don't we tend to define who we are by what we lack, by what our disappointments and failures are? We don't do this all the time, but just enough to keep us from living the abundant life that God wants for us? Why is it when we get the chance to take a risk—we are reminded of every failure and disappointment that we've experienced before? Could it be that we've allowed these things to possess us? Are we Legion too?

We live in a culture that exists by creating the sense of lack. The goal of many advertisements is to make us feel like we're missing something in our life; that we won't be complete unless we purchase what they're selling. Too often we believe them and we buy what

they're selling. Think about what's in our homes—how many things are there that we really don't need. Why did we buy it? We bought it because we believed the claim that they made about us—that we are deficient in something.

In this Gospel story the only thing that Jesus does is to heal this man and give him back his identity before he leaves. Jesus transformed him from Legion to a human being again. And Jesus is still doing that today. He is still coming over to our strange land of doubts and insecurities to drive out our demons. He comes to show us that we are more than what people label us. Our identities are not lose, one of those people, drunk, addict. It's not ugly, disabled or damaged.

Our identities have been given to us at our baptisms when we were washed with water, marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit—forever! We are not insufficient or undeserving of love; no, we are beloved children of God; heirs with Christ to God's kingdom—no matter what the world out there tell us! It is in our baptism that our true identities are given to us; never to be taken away.

But we need to be reminded of this wonderful identity time and time again because the world keeps trying to tell us otherwise. And when it does we come back here, back to the church to have our demons cast out, our true identity restored and be reminded again just how much God loves us. We come and are reminded that we are a beloved child—worthy of love, honor and respect. We come and are reminded that God loves us enough to die for us and no matter how hard the world tries to take that away from us; it can't.

Today as you leave you will have the opportunity to remember your baptism. There is water in the font; as you pass by dip your finger in the water and trace the sign of the cross on your forehead to remind yourself that your identity is beloved child of God!