

Pentecost 2 Lectionary 12 - Sunday, June 19, 2022  
Luke 8:26-39 Rev. Paul Sartison

There was an old pastor way back when I was much younger whose name was George Evenson. Some of you might know the name, some might not. In the part of the church I grew up in he was kind of a legendary pastor, if there can really be such a thing. The first time I met him he was long retired and well into his seventies, and we had a very brief chat; maybe five minutes. The second time I met him was about five years later, and he looked me in the eye and said, “Hello Paul, how are you doing?” And I wasn’t even wearing one of those church convention name tags. He just knew my name.

Jesus steps off the boat on to land and a man from the city meets him. What’s his name? He has demons, we hear, and he’s lived naked in tombs for a long long time. He’s been put in chains to be restrained, he’s been held under guard to be kept under control, and Jesus says, “What is your name?” And he replies, “My name is Legion.”

That’s not his real name. Anyone at that time, in early first century Palestine, would know what “Legion” means. The land was occupied by the Roman Empire, and the Roman Army kept the colonies under control, and the Roman army was divided into Legions. A Legion was a division in the army of around 5000 soldiers. So when Jesus asks a man, “What is your name?”, and the answer is “Legion,” it’s not really his name; it’s just that he has a legion of demons. The message might be sneaky but clear: this man has been taken over by a Legion of demons, like the land has been taken over and controlled by legions and armies, and Jesus is no more on the side of empires and their armies than he is on the side of demons who drive someone into the wilderness to live among the tombs.

To the Romans, the land that they occupy is not Judah or Galilee or Gedara where this story takes place. It's just a place to be dominated and controlled, kept in line by legions. No name of its own.

And this person Jesus meets on the shore? We don't hear his name, we know nothing about him except that he doesn't have his own life, he's driven by demons, he's dominated and controlled like an occupied country, and he doesn't even get a name. He's just Legion.

I guess he probably has many names. Someone might ask what his name is and he might just answer, "They call me crazy."

What is your name? They call me That One Who Lives in the Tombs."

What is your name? "They call me "Put Him in Chains and Keep Him Quiet."

What is your name? "I guess it's I've Got a Demon."

What is your name? There are five thousand names people could call him, but we never hear what his name is. He only gets named by the powers that control him. All kinds of names. A Legion of names.

Names matter? Not the names everyone calls you or me or anyone; the names that are our own.

Remember in the summer of 2020, the first summer of the pandemic, when the Black Lives Matter movement was so visible? Again and again, people gathered and said as one, "Say their names!" because the real names of real people matter. It's why we want to find out the names of kids in unmarked residential school graves – their names matter.

We lose a loved one and we say their names – in prayers and memories and sermons and stories and laughter and tears. Their names. When a baby is born the first or maybe second or third thing we tell people, right off the top, is their name. We baptize a beloved of God: Marla Jane, Waylon Jameson, Nola Danielle, Bernard Edward, Christina Wilma, Telmor Garth, Scott Richard, Emily Alanna, Stewart Allan, you are baptized.

We meet someone and ask their name and give them ours. And we ask again the next time and the next time because we forget, but we ask because we know that it matters.

What is your name? Monica. Tim. Adam. Karsten. Lydia. It matters. You know what it's like when someone calls you by name. What is your name? It's not Legion. It's not whatever name someone else chooses to give you. What is your name? It matters.

Jesus meets this man who says his name is Legion, and then in what really is a funny twist the demons say, "Please don't send us into the abyss, into the depths. Send us into those pigs over there." So Jesus says, "OK, you can go there." And the demons called Legion leave and go into the pigs, and the pigs run into the lake, into the deeps, into the abyss, and they drown. And the name Legion is drowned along with them.

I wonder what he'll say now, when the people in the city and the country find him clothed and in his right mind, and they ask him his name. Maybe he'll just smile and say, "My name is Elmer. My name is not "Occupied" or "Crazy" or "Lives in Tombs," or "Stay Away from That Guy." I've got a name, and it's Elmer."

And then when he tells them what Jesus has done, maybe he'll say, "Jesus gave me back my name. For such a long time someone else answered for me and said that my name is "Legion." But Jesus gave me back my name. And my name is – *here, say your name.*"

What names are you know by? We have so many names, so many things they call us. Some of the names sit well. Her name is Smart. His name is Generous. That one over there: Their name is Witty. Your name is Considerate, or sometimes your name might be Gorgeous, or they might say that you are to be called Really Got It Together. Great names...but even when we're given a really good name it can be so hard to live up to; it can be exhausting trying to keep that name.

Sometimes the names we're given aren't so good. "You shall be named Obnoxious," or we will call you, "Don't Get on Their Bad Side." Or maybe you name yourself something like "I Really Blew That," as though one mistake says who you are. That's a favourite of mine, to be honest.

I've heard people in prison say that it feels like they're only know by one name: "Criminal," as though that's the only thing they've ever done. Or the market sometimes knows us by one name: Consumer. Or politics might know us by only one name: Voter.

What is your name? There are so many. A Legion of Names.

What is your name?

Your name is Beloved Child of God. And the great thing is that God is not waiting for you to get rid of all those other names before God will love you with that new name. And God is not waiting for any of us to make a good name for

ourselves, or get the right name, before God names us Beloved Child of God. Life gives us so many names. Addict? Cyclist? Lover? Cree? Yoruba? Newfie? Diabetic? Lutheran? Samaritan? Gentile? Jew? Vegetarian, Married, Single, Divorced, Somewhere on the Spectrum? PhD? Manly Man, Grade 8 Education, Retired, Gender Fluid, Climbing the Corporate Ladder, Unemployed? Life gives us so many names; some a blessing, some a curse, some a bit of each. But your name, my name, our name, is beloved child of God.

Take that name with you. And tell what Jesus has done: Given us back our name, named us Beloved Child of God. Set us free.

AMEN.