

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)

## *Weekend Connections*

May 29



### **Meditation: Looking Into Evil**

There was a time in my youth when horror films seemed to dominate the box office. Aliens, deranged camp counselors, nightmarish spirits, hordes of zombies, a prom queen, and a wayward son became cinematic regulars crawling, haunting, slashing, killing, and terrorizing everyone on film. These films represented the bleak social outlook of the 1970s, and studios bankrolled numerous productions with star-studded casts and top-billing directors. At the 1973 Academy Awards, a horror film was nominated for ten awards including Best Motion Picture. The film was *The Exorcist*, the story of a little girl possessed by a demon.

Not as intense as the special-effects driven film, the gospels have their own story of demonic possession. Matthew, Mark, and Luke provide a narrative where Jesus encounters a man at Gerasenes. The man has been restrained, but continually breaks the shackles and chains. He becomes bruised and howls as he makes his home amongst the tombs and mountains. When Jesus approaches him, he bows and states that his name is Legion.

For centuries the church has read this as a story of an individual who finally finds peace at the hands of Jesus. Yet, there is significant evidence that this story is not only about an individual withering from torment, but an everyman allegory about a group of people afflicted by the occupation of the Roman Empire. Primarily, Gerasenes, located centrally in the modern-day area of the Golan Heights, was a city inhabited by Gentiles whose Roman citizenship outnumbered the indigenous Semitic population. According to Roswell Hitchcock, the city's name can signify those who come from a fight. Telling too is the name Legion. This is the title given to Rome's elite heavy infantry assembled of only citizens often sent to control the Empire's territories. Thus, the narrative unfolds the plight of a non-Citizen plagued by the legion of an Empire. The specifics of Roman occupation are absent, but the results of the oppression are present. The nameless man is not the antagonist of this gospel pericope, but the victim of the principalities and powers occupying his homeland. As a result, he, and those like him, is outcast, bruised, pained, and demonized.

I have thought about this story over the past weeks as we have all watched news about Ahmaud Arbery, Christian Cooper, and George Floyd. The parallels are too striking as African Americans are treated with open hostility, continually oppressed, and routinely murdered by the legion of the American Empire. These horrible actions continue to proliferate, and with each new episode disbelief and anger abound. The words we have to describe such atrocities fail to capture the true horror of the situations, and we are again confronted with the systemic situations that produce these demons.

As much as I now read the Gerasenes story as an indictment of the Roman Empire and its systemic oppression of non-citizens that parallels the United States' treatment of African-American people, there is another part of the narrative that causes me pause. In Mark's retelling, the restored man asks to flee with Jesus on the departing boat, and Jesus denies him entry and orders the man to tell his neighbors of Jesus's mercy. Jesus then sails away. Every time I read this, I have the same visceral reaction and scream, "NO!" Did Jesus think that the people's

oppression would miraculously end without Rome leaving the area? Could Jesus not see the privilege of escaping the territory? As a white person, my criticism of a system is for naught if I am not willing to share the boat. In fact, I should be willing to make room for others to offer their collective experiences and wisdom on where the boat should go. For liberation, I must be willing to rewrite the narrative giving voice to those who are often silenced. I should be willing to say, "Yes, yes, of course, get in this boat. I'll row. You have to be exhausted and tired. Where do you think we should go? I'll work with you to get us there."

*-Brian Crisp*

### Stay Connected to Pullen Church during Covid-19

We hope that you will join us for services on Sunday at 11am via livestream. This Sunday, we look forward to hearing from our Pullen Youth as they lead the service.

Please visit the Pullen Website for an archive of the latest email and video links:



Staying Connected

Watch our Livestream Services

Artwork in header: [Snow Storm](#) by English artist [Joseph Mallord William Turner](#)



**Pullen Memorial Baptist Church**

1801 Hillsborough St. | Raleigh, NC 27605  
919-828-0897 | [www.pullen.org](http://www.pullen.org) | [@PullenChurch](https://www.instagram.com/PullenChurch)

