

**Southport Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. Kevin Bausman**  
**January 25, 2009**

**The Value of Life**  
**Luke 8:26-39 (NIV)**

**26**They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. **27**When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. **28**When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!” **29**For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

**30**Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

”Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. **31**And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

**32**A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. **33**When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

**34**When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, **35**and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. **36**Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. **37**Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

**38**The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, **39**”Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.”

Today is Sanctity of Life Sunday. Increasingly we live in an age where human life from the unborn to the aged is being devalued by our society and culture. The *New York Times* editorial I mentioned two weeks ago is only a reflection of this by attempting to force medical personnel of conscience and faith to participate in abortions.

Our scripture reading for today is a powerful event that contrasts the value of life between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this age. It pits the value of life according to Jesus against the lack of value of life by the evil one and those living in this fallen, broken world. The deliverance of this demon-possessed man by Jesus paints this difference in stark contrast.

First, we see life is valued in this passage because all human life bears the image of God no matter how broken or battered that life is. This demon-possessed man could not be a more powerful example of this. He is alienated from family and friends—no one is mentioned as even being personally concerned about him. He is alienated from his community. He is forced to live among the dead. We

read: **“For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.” (Luke 8:27, NIV)**

He often lived by himself. We read: **“Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.” (Luke 8:29, NIV)**

And because demons rule his life, and not God, he is even alienated from his Creator. He is one alienated man. To many, his life seems worthless, one of torment, and a good case for elimination. He is a menace to himself and to his community.

Yet Jesus comes and heals him. Why? Because, he bears the image of God. **Genesis 1:27** says, **“God created man in his own image, in the image of God, he created him; male and female he created them.”** That image might be marred or even battered and broken as in the demon-possessed man, but is it not gone. Concerning the image of God, Ron Sider writes, “The dignity and worth of every human being flows from divine decree, not human decision. Our essential humanity does not come from government, social interaction or self-actualization. It comes from the Creator of the galaxies who selected human beings alone out of all the created order to bear the divine image (**Gen 1:28**). God prohibits murder. It is precisely because the neighbor bears this unique divine stamp that murder is wrong (Gen 9:6). So precious, indeed, is every person that the Sovereign of history suffered the hell of Roman crucifixion so that whoever believes may live forever in the presence of the living God.” (Ron Sider, *Completely Pro-Life*, pp. 44)

It is interesting that most of the commentaries I read on this passage see the demon-possessed man as having basically a psychological problem such as schizophrenia. While that is a real psychological issue, what we have here involves something more, something spiritual. It involves the supernatural. It involves the evil one’s attempt to take over this man’s life and destroy him.

Had these commentators been from the Third World instead of Europe or the U.S. or Australia, they would not have tried to psychoanalyze away this passage. In the Third World, they know, they understand the supernatural.

Trying to psychoanalyze away this passage not only leaves us open to not understanding the power of the evil one, but also removes us from seeing one of the reasons the evil one tries to destroy life. Human life bears the image of God, and the evil one hates God and anything that reminds him of God—especially the image of God seen in human beings.

The possession of this man by demons is one way the evil ones seek to destroy human life. The demon possession is slowly destroying this human life by disconnecting and destroying all relationships he had or has—with others, with himself, and with God. Eventually this demon possession will destroy both this man’s life and soul as he is disconnected from all relationships. I remember hearing in my college psychology about a study done in London after World War II with baby orphans that found those who received less human interaction from nurses had a greater death and illness rate than others. People need love to survive. This demon-possessed man who is alienated from everyone was eventually going to die from lack of love.

Hatred of the image of God is one of the prime reasons the evil one seeks to destroy human life—from an unborn child to an aged man, from a healthy person to a person with ill health, from race to religion, he seeks to destroy.

An example of this hatred of the image of God by the evil one can be seen in Auschwitz, the prison camp in Poland that the Nazis used to incarcerate and kill Poles, Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, the intelligentsia of Poland, Christian leaders such as Father Maximilian Kolbe, and others. Last year on our Poland mission trip, we visited Auschwitz one day. Such a visit helps to understand the history and context of missions work today in Poland (which, by the way, has the least number of missionaries of any nation in the world).

Auschwitz was the saddest and one of the most evil places I have ever been. Reading what happened there, hearing it from a guide who lost family there, and seeing it for myself, showed me the

absolute evil that went on there. It was a powerful example of how the evil one, using the Nazi movement in Germany under Hitler, sought to devalue and destroy human life.

Deceit was used as Jewish prisoners were brought there thinking they were just being re-settled. Like cattle at an auction as they exited the train, a German officer chose who was kept alive and who was sent to death. The only prisoners kept alive were healthy young men. Women, children and the aged were sent to showers for de-licing—only to be gassed to death and their bodies cremated,—their ashes spread over the nearby fields.

The Nazis took and used everything from their Jewish prisoners. Gold fillings from their teeth were removed. Any valuables found whether in suitcases or in hollow wooden legs were kept. At the concentration camp museum, they not only had pictures—many taken secretly—of the camp and its victims, but also displays of empty poisonous gas canisters, suitcases of the victims with their names on them, shoes of men, women and children, personal effects such as razors, combs, toothbrushes, and other items that the Nazis were not able to destroy before the Russian army arrived. However, the most heart-wrenching display was a long wall of human hair from the victims. The Nazis shaved the hair from their victims and would send it back to Berlin to be made into rugs and clothing.

If this bothers you, it should. It should also make you thank our veterans who fought against this evil in World War II. For there are times we must go to war to stop evil. We cannot hide our eyes and ears from such evil. If we do, we are doomed. There is a quote from George Santayana at the end of that hall that says, “Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.”

We must be aware of the evil one’s ways to destroy people because they bear the image of God.

Second, the demon-possessed man did not live a productive life. He had no value to the townspeople. Note that the people in the town of this demon-possessed man, instead of being glad for the man himself, and glad for their town, its residents, and children to no longer have to live in fear of him, instead of being grateful for what happened, have this response in **Luke 8:37**: “**Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear.**” No one thanked Jesus or praised God for this man’s deliverance, except the man himself. The people’s response was one of fear instead of joy. Why? I find one commentator’s insights very revealing about the people’s responses. Leon Morris said, “With all the evidence that a great miracle had been wrought before them, these people proceeded to reject the greatest opportunity of their lives. They might have welcomed Jesus, the liberator of men from demons. Instead, seized with great fear, they asked Him to leave. So he left. Their fear may have been a superstitious reaction to the supernatural power that had so evidently been in operation. It may also have been associated with the material loss involved in the destruction of the pigs. If so, they saw Jesus as a disturbing person, more interested in saving men than in material prosperity. It was more comfortable to ask Him to go.” (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Luke*, pp. 156, 157)

The people’s response was one of selfishness. They valued their pigs and their own state of complacency more than this man’s life. They valued other things more than the value of the life of a human being. To God, people are always more valuable than things or animals or comfort. William Barclay writes: “One of life’s supreme dangers is to value things more than persons. That is what created slums and vicious working conditions...No thing in this world can ever be as important as a person.” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, Revised Edition, p. 109)

“Christians,” says one author, “therefore ought to reject every notion that makes human dignity and value depend on some humanly defined quality of life, some individually chosen level of self-fulfillment, or some societally determined level of social usefulness. No matter how poor and defenseless, old and weak, crippled and deformed, young and helpless, human beings enjoy God-given worth and dignity that sets them apart from the rest of creation.” (Sider, *Completely Pro-Life*, p. 44)

Yet even our world today reflects this same value system of the people of this town. People have value only when they are productive or give us something or we benefit from them. Material things are also more important than people. Listen to these words about our culture and its “values.”

“In the larger society...economic concerns are important. Quietly it is hinted that it is cheaper for society to permit poor women to abort than to expand welfare rolls...Similarly, aborting potentially handicapped fetuses is more convenient than increasing societal funding for services for the handicapped...To what extent is the issue really affluence versus respect for the sanctity of human life?

“One can hardly avoid remembering the Nazi defense of genocide, enunciated in 1935 by Arthur Gueth, director of public health in Nazi Germany: ‘The ill-conceived “love of thy neighbor” has to disappear, especially in relation to inferior or asocial creatures. It is the supreme duty of a national state to grant life and livelihood only to the healthy and hereditarily sound portion of the people to secure the maintenance of a hereditarily sound and racially pure folk for all eternity. The life of an individual has meaning only in the light of that ultimate aim, that is in the light of his meaning to his family and to his national state.’” (Sider, *Completely Pro-Life*, pp. 41-43)

Many in our culture also view the human body only as a machine to be used and tossed aside when no longer needed. “Belief in the sanctity of life leads Christians to affirm not only the goodness of the human body but that the body and soul are one. Genesis tells us that **‘God saw all that he had made and it was very good...’ (Genesis 1:31)** The goodness of the body is affirmed by Jesus Christ in that the Son of God came to earth in the *flesh* and was resurrected bodily from the grave.

“‘I have the right to control my body’ is the chorus heard so often from postmodern secularists...But what if our bodies are one with our souls and not belong ultimately to us but to God?

“The secularist view reduces the body to a machine that’s to be judged by its usefulness.”

“The greatest advocate in our day for utilitarian ethics, Professor Peter Singer, argues for infanticide and euthanasia as good things, since they free resources to maximize the happiness of the majority.” (Chuck Colson, *The Faith*, pp. 175-176, 183, 185)

Our culture also devalues human life through its fascination with celebrities. Celebrityism is just as wrong as discrimination against someone because they are poor or a different color. For celebrityism is saying some people are more valuable or important than others because they are famous or popular or good looking. Since when is one human life more valuable or important than another because of its status as a celebrity? Certainly not with God who is no respecter of people or player of favorites as the Book of James points out.

Several years ago Henri Nouwen gave a talk at Harvard. “It was entitled, ‘The Peace That is Not of This World,’ and in it he described his experience of moving from being a professor at Harvard teaching the ‘best and the brightest,’ to use his words, to a community for handicapped people called Daybreak, near Toronto...

“At Daybreak he [was] called ‘an assistant.’ His only assignment, like that of the three others, [was] to care for six handicapped people in his ‘family’ unit. An epileptic young man named Adam [was] his special assignment. Nouwen bathed, shaved, dressed, and cared for Adam’s needs. After a seizure, Nouwen [had to] bathe and soothe Adam until the trauma [was] past. And in Adam, he [saw] God’s unqualified love for a person who can neither produce nor perform.” (Lloyd Ogilvie, *A Future and a Hope*, pp. 35, 36)

God values a human life above all things even if that life, like Adam’s, can neither produce nor perform.

Finally, we see here the value of human life simply because of God’s love for all human beings in sending Jesus. Part of Jesus’ mission was to help people such as this demoniac be set free. It was part of the love of God for people. Jesus said in **Matthew 12:29**, **“But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”**

God loves the weakest and hurting that the world wants to toss away. Over and over again God shows love to the unlovable and the unlovely such as the demon-possessed man, outcasts such as lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, Gentiles, etc. Chuck Colson said, “Christians believe that men and women were created intentionally and purposefully in God’s image. God proves how dear men and women are to Him throughout the whole drama of human history. He acts consistently to bring the human person on

whom He lavished such gifts back into relationship with Him—even sending His Son to give His life for every human being, even for those we ourselves hate—like mass murderers, child molesters, and terrorists. God puts no one beyond His mercy.” (Colson, *The Faith*, p. 174)

This belief in God’s love for all people was a prime motivation for Christians throughout history not only to defend the life of the unborn but to stand against euthanasia, the Nazis in World War II, slavery, racism, and child labor. It led them to push for equal treatment of women, safer working conditions in mines and factories, relieving poverty, caring for the poor, etc.

The church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century must continue this passion and stand firm against anything that devalues, cheapens or takes life away. Two weeks ago I shared what was the prime motivation for William Wilberforce, John Wesley, and others in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England to fight the evils of that day. Chuck Colson, whom I quoted then, said, “You’ll find as well that the common denominator running through all of these efforts was a deep passion for the dignity and sanctity of every human life—the kids chained to the loading carts in the mines, the slaves crammed into the holds of ships so tight many died of suffocation, and the poor in East London who were dying wretched deaths on the streets. They were committed to the worth of every single living person, rich, poor, black, white, ill or in good health, at the beginning of life on its end.” (p. 170)

“When Christians today see life through God’s eyes, just as Wilberforce and his spiritual heirs did in the nineteenth century, we are compelled not only to care for the poor and vulnerable but to defend every human’s God-given right. This is why Christians believe in the sanctity of life at every state, from birth to death.” (Colson, *The Faith*, p. 171)

Michael J. Gorman, in his book, *Abortion and the Early Church*, writes: “The earliest Christian ethic, from Jesus to Constantine, can be described as a consistent pro-life, ethic....It pleaded for the poor, the weak, women, children and the unborn. This pro-life ethic discarded hate in favor of love, war in favor of peace, oppression in favor of justice, bloodshed in favor of life.” (Michael J. Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*)

May we continue in the steps of the early Christian church in seeing the value of all human life.  
Amen.