

Title: Messiah's Law

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Text: [Luke 8:26-39](#)

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Has anybody here not heard of Murphy's Law? Most of you know it. If anything can go wrong, it will.

Murphy's Law was created in 1949 during a U.S. Air Force study on the effects of rapid deceleration on pilots. Volunteers were strapped on a rocket-propelled sled and their condition was monitored as the sled was brought to

an abrupt halt. The monitoring was done by electrodes fitted to a harness designed by Captain Edward A. Murphy. After what had seemed to be a flawless test run one day, the harness failed to record any data. Murphy discovered that every one of its electrodes had been wired incorrectly, prompting him to declare: "If anything can go wrong, it will."

It caught on and has been used liberally for decades. There are variations of it that you might have heard. Like, "The line next to you will finish first." Think about the next time you are in Kroger or stuck on I465. Or, Murphy's Law of socks. "If odd socks can be created, they will be." Anyone who has hunted through a drawer looking for a matching pair will have been struck by the ubiquity of unmatched socks.¹ Or, "The chief cause of problems is solutions."²

Jesus didn't know those laws. But he did know the Messiah's law. It is similar to "no good deed goes unpunished." Put in theological terms, "If you love, you get hurt." That's the Messiah's Law. Can you say it? "If you love, you get hurt."

That's at the heart of our story today, one of Jesus' greatest miracle, the healing of the Gerasene demoniac. Let me give you the summary that leads to the takeaway. Jesus heals a demon-possessed man who has terrorized his family and community for years. He loves him into wholeness. For this incredible miracle, what does Jesus get? He is asked to leave. Can you imagine asking Jesus to leave, to go away because of his love and compassion for someone broken? What's the Messiah's Law? "If you love, you get hurt."³

You've got it now. That's the takeaway. "If you love, you get hurt." If you like, you can now check out. For the rest of the sermon, you can play Wordscapes, or write down your grocery list or take a nap, because you've got the takeaway. But remember, "If you love, you get hurt." It's the Messiah's Law and we see it in our story.

It starts when Jesus and his disciples land on the eastern side of Sea of Galilee. There was a hint that a storm was coming because they traveled through a storm. As they sailed from the Jewish side on the west, they go through a storm. The disciples panic, thinking they were in danger. They wake Jesus up. He calms the storm and they are amazed. Little do they know that another storm is coming, on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

They land the fishing boat "...at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him." (Luke 8:26-27) We discover that he wasn't really a man of the city any longer and hadn't been for a long time. The demons that possessed him were strong and they had been for many years. No one knows when they showed up. Does anyone ever really know? They look back and wondered when did they first starting noticing that he wasn't right? Did it start early, when he was a young child? Or did it emerge later? Was there an accident that caused the change? Or did someone abuse him?

He is living in the tombs, outside of the city. "How long has he been up there?" "I don't know, long enough for his clothes to have worn off." We tried to keep this from happening. For a long time, "...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" (Luke 8:28) It was all we knew to do, but that wasn't even enough."

Do you get the picture? He's naked as a jaybird, whacked out of his mind, lost and filled with demons. He lives in a cemetery and he won't shut up! In Mark version of this story, he howls like a dog to the moon and bruises himself on rocks, self-mutilating so he can feel something. Can you imagine the pain his family experience? It's like the Messiah's law. If you love, you get hurt. Many parents know the pain of a son or daughter lost and struggling with problems, with issues, with demons.

Not one, many. We learn this from his own lips. As Jesus approaches, he falls on his knees begging Jesus. "Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him." (Luke 8:30) Legion. A legion is 5000 Roman soldiers. 5000 attacking this man from the inside out. What were they? Depression, anxiety, panic, anorexia, schizophrenia, bi-polarity, schizoaffective disorder, OCD, ADHD, PTSD? All of

the above? I can't get to 5,000. Can you come up with 5,000? The DSM-5 (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) doesn't even have 5,000. Maybe it was an addiction. I think addiction is possible because like anyone who has ever been to an A-A, an N-A, or an AI-Anon meeting, you know there is power in introducing yourself and naming your addiction. Naming an addiction causes it to lose power. The Gerasene demoniac does just. After proclaiming Jesus as the Son of the Most High God, this man falls to his knees and names his demon. Legion.

We shouldn't be surprised by that. We can look around at the many challenges in our community, in our congregation, in our families. Overdose and addiction is the number one cause of death in Americans under 50. We don't talk about it, but almost 15% of us will develop a substance abuse issue at some point in our lives.⁴ Did you know those tiny vaping Juuls hold the equivalent of 20 cigarettes of liquid nicotine each? 37% of high school seniors and over 10% of 8th graders vape.⁵ Over half of us have a close relative suffering from dependency, addiction or abuse.⁶ One in every five adults has a prescription for opioids, and almost 70% of all drug-related deaths involved opioids.⁷ Legion. And those who love those who are struggling with any or all of the above, know this truth. "If you love, you get hurt."

Look carefully beyond that love and hurt and see what Jesus is doing. It is a truth to grab onto because this story says Jesus is willing to meet us in our darkest tombs and he does so with the promise of power. He commands the unclean spirits, the demons, the long term illness and afflictions that plagued his life to come out. It doesn't happen with a special ceremony or a holy incantation or even a touch by Jesus. It happens because of a profession and presence. The demoniac professes the name of Jesus and receives power over the demons. I believe that happened in the land of the Gerasenes and it is something that can happen also today. A relationship with Jesus is filled with a promise and a power to address all of the challenges and more which are named and faced. But it comes with a cost and we are about to see it.

They asked Jesus to leave because the cost of this power was too great. Jesus liberated a tragic, tormented member of the community and the community itself from a legion of demons and they were so upset, Jesus gets driven out of town. This is how it happened.

The legion of demons begs Jesus not to be sent into the abyss. I guess even demons recognize that hell is a terrible place. They suggested an alternative. "... there on the hillside, a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine,

and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.”
(Luke 8:32-33)

Someone goes and tells the owners that their herd of swine has been lost. They return and see the town crazy man, the tormented demoniac, the one that was beyond saving, wearing clothes and sitting quietly at the feet of Jesus. It is a wonderful picture of the power that Jesus can offer. “Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear.” (Luke 8:36-37) What’s there to be afraid of? Who wouldn’t want that kind of power, the power to change your life, to address your demons?

What? You don’t have any demons? You don’t have anything you struggle with, nothing that you wish you could get away from, get on top of, or wish you could let go of?

We all have demons. But instead of addressing them head-on, we go to great lengths to avoid them, or deny them, or silence them, control them, or if all else fail, escape from them. You know the voices, the feelings, the out-of-control thoughts, habits, which affect our minds and bodies. The truth is, at least 50% of us have suffered depression or mental illness, or will, at some point in our lives.⁸ We all have demons, which is probably why Jesus made the trip to a spiritually unclean, Roman-occupied, gentile town full of swine herders in the first place. Jesus had a point to make: no one is so unclean as to be out of God’s reach. But we’re not sure we want to hear that and they didn’t either. They were afraid that if Jesus stayed around they might have to address the demons that each of them were dealing with.⁹

But it was more than that. This exorcism of the town crazy was expensive. Do you realize how much money rushed over that cliff and drowned in the lake? The economic impact of Jesus’ loving act was too much. They counted the cost of the healing and found it to be too expensive. The cost of love is too much. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine that some might not be willing to invest resources into Jesus’ ministry even if it had such a positive effect? They asked him to leave.

We are sorry, Jesus, but you know how it is. “No good deed goes unpunished.” Can you imagine what Jesus felt when he gets in the boat to return to the other side of the Sea of Galilee? Being asked to leave by those you seek to help is a pain unlike any other.¹⁰ Can you put your finger on the emotion? I think I can. It’s this. “If you love, you get hurt.” It’s the Messiah’s Law. We should know this. “If you love, you get hurt.”

In this fallen world, where sin and evil infest the places and spaces of our lives, our faithful, compassionate acts of ministry are as likely to be met with contempt as gratitude. In fact, Christians can expect that until the kingdom of God is truly "on earth as it is in heaven," our attempts at making the kingdom won't always be appreciated; they might even be shunned and ridiculed. Believe me. Your good intentions are going to get misread, your good deeds will sometime boomerang and hit you in the head. Sometimes, being faithful, doing the right thing, won't be appreciated. But just because you are rejected doesn't mean you stop doing them, that you stop loving. You keep loving, knowing this truth, "If you love, you get hurt."¹¹

Love doesn't come without pain or misery. We should know this and Jesus demonstrates it today when healing of the Gerasene demoniac. But it won't be the last time he demonstrates it. The last time comes when Jesus saves us on a cross.

That's not your responsibility. God didn't put you here to save the world. Jesus did that. You are here to be faithful in the place and to the people God put you with. And sometimes it won't be easy. Love didn't come without pain or misery for Jesus. Love won't come without pain or misery for us either. That's Messiah's Law. What is it? If you love, you get hurt. Take that home; you need it to live a faithful life like Jesus.

¹ The Science of Murphy's Law. Scientific America. April 1997.

<http://zazzetti.altervista.org/downloads/murphy.pdf>

² Eric Sevareid. CBS News. 1970.

³ Sweet, Leonard. Murphy's Law and Messiah's Law. Retrieved by subscription at sermons.com.

⁴ Seelye, K. (Nov. 17, 2016) Fraction of Americans with Drug Addiction Receive Treatment, Surgeon General Says. *The New York Times*: www.nytimes.com.

⁵ National Institute on Drug Abuse. (Dec. 17, 2018): www.drugabuse.gov.

⁶ Ahrnsbrak, R. (Sept 2017) Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from 2016: *National Survey on Drug Use and Health Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality*.

⁷ Understanding the Epidemic. www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/peidemic. All of the above statistics quoted and noted as such in "I Beg You, Do Not Torment Me", Lori Raible, June 23, 2019, Day 1.

⁸ Seelye, K.

⁹ Raible, Lori.

¹⁰ Craddock, Fred. Interpretation: Luke. P. 118.

¹¹ Sweet, Leonard.