

If you can for a minute, imagine yourself as Jesus' press agent. You set up a meeting with Jesus just before the crucifixion because you have some serious problems to discuss. Namely, Jesus isn't doing himself any favors. You say, "Jesus, now you're planning on starting a world-wide movement, right?" "Right."

"And you're going to base this movement on the message that the kingdom of God has come near and that people should look to you for salvation, right?" "Right."

And you're going to say that because of your promise of salvation that people can look forward to it to help them through tough times on earth. Plus, when they work and share together in community they can make a better life for themselves in the here and now. Right?" "Right."

"Okay, we've got some problems."

"Problems?"

"Sure, look at what you did just last Monday. The disciples tell me you came upon a fig tree looking for figs but there weren't any on it. The reason there weren't any on it was

because it wasn't the season for figs. So you cursed the tree. The next day your disciples noted that the tree had withered and died.

"Now that may be a great show of the power of faith and all, but I happen to know the owner of that fig tree. He isn't too happy. To make matters worse his insurance company is refusing to cover the damage because they say it was caused by an, 'act of God,' and his policy doesn't cover that.

"The same thing happened when you went over into the land of the Geresenes. No one's doubting that it was a great miracle that you drove that legion of demons out of that guy. Everyone is happy that the crazy guy who couldn't be restrained and ran around naked all the time is now in his right mind, but the owners of the pigs aren't happy. They too went to their insurance agent in order to get coverage for the destruction of their herd. And again, their policy has exclusions for "acts of God.

"Jesus, a lot of people depended on those pigs for their livelihood. The pigs were literally the bacon on their table. And of course you as a Jew may not care about pigs all that much, them being unclean animals and all, but the Geresenes like their bacon cheeseburgers. Have you gone shopping lately? Do you know what ham and pork loin and bacon are selling for in the

supermarkets over in Geresene territory? The people aren't happy!

"And it's okay that you spar with the religious leaders from time to time over religious stuff. It makes for good publicity when you expose their hypocrisy. Healing people on the Sabbath is always a good way to get attention for good works. But you nearly caused a riot when you overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple! If they had gotten ahold of you it would have been the end. Don't take on the big boys in their home turf. They have press agents too and can sway public opinion against you.

"All I'm saying is that I know you can do amazing miracles and all. And I don't want to dampen your style, but how about performing those miracles without quite so much collateral damage? It'll make it so much easier to sell your message."

"No."

"No, you say. Come on Jesus. This is the first century. Get with the times and market your stuff with the packaging people are looking for."

"No, people need the Truth. I came to proclaim the Truth and I won't waver from it. Our meeting is over."

When we come across Bible readings like our gospel reading with this demon possessed non-Jew and the herd of pigs it may challenge our understanding of Jesus. I think we often inadvertently domesticate Jesus like a house-broken dog. We make Jesus sweet and kind and compassionate. While Jesus was sweet and kind and compassionate, he was not going to hide the true power of the Truth either.

Jesus' miracles had repercussions for the people who experienced them. Nowhere in the Bible is the phrase, "And they all lived happily ever after." No, if you're going to interact with real power there will be real consequences.

Now of course Jesus was not mean. He didn't deliberately set out to destroy things. He just wasn't as tame as we might want him to be. In C.S. Lewis' book series the Chronicles of Narnia the lion Aslan is the Christ figure. In one scene in the book *The Silver Chair* the character Jill is very thirsty and wants a drink of water from a stream. But Aslan is standing by the stream. She doesn't know anything about Aslan and she is very frightened. She asks, "'Do you eat girls?'" 'I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and

emperors, cities and realms,' said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it." (Pg. 17)

The truth is that your salvation didn't come easily or effortlessly for God. In fact it was and is quite a messy job. The cross was no fun. But God did it.

When we portray Jesus as too nice and sweet we inadvertently make our failings nice and sweet too. But the problems of this world are deeply entrenched.

In Jesus' day people believed there were little demons running around everywhere. Every sickness from a minor cold to deadly pneumonia was believed to be caused by demons. Diseases, mental illness, and all irrational behaviors were considered the work of demons.

Perhaps we have changed the names of things. We no longer label everything we do not understand a demon. But changing the name does not change the reality of the pain and brokenness.

I see irrational behavior happening all around us. Why oh why do people get their lives entirely wrapped up in appearances? Why do people spend their whole lives trying to impress people they don't even like? Why do people work their tail off to get an education and then pay off the debt while buying a house and having a mortgage and racing through life at a break-neck pace only because everyone else around them is caught in the same trap but everyone believes that this is somehow the only way to be successful.

Isn't it interesting the way many adolescents rebel against their parents? They may rebel by breaking family rules, maybe clothing styles and their choice of friends, maybe body art, drinking and drugs, sexual activity and on goes the list; all in order to claim themselves as unique individuals - except everyone around them is trying to be an individual in the exact same way!

That qualifies as demon possession in my book. Truly being an individual and rising above the pressures of culture is hard.

But if you want to be free... if you want to fully be the unique person God made when God created you... if you're not going to be bound by the oppression of others and instead have true life - and life abundantly as Jesus promised it - the road isn't easy.

When God acts in true power the world changes. And not everyone is happy about that. Those invested in keeping the status quo aren't happy. Jesus didn't get into trouble for what happened to the pigs but the people asked him to leave. They were too afraid of such power. There is no need to be afraid of God's power. It will hold you and keep you. But it isn't always sweet. That God for the true power which saves us. Amen