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“Saving Your Bacon and Losing Your Lord”

Matthew 8:28-34

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Take your bulletin, roll it into a tube about 1 1/2 inches in diameter, and hold it up to your right eye with your right hand. Then hold your left hand palm open halfway down the tube. Open both eyes and tell me what you see.

Oh my gosh! There's a *hole* in the middle of your hand! Somebody had better call a doctor! You all have holes in your hands . . . or maybe in your heads. Now take the tube and place it next to somebody's head. We *do* have holes in our heads!

Now, you don't really believe that there's a hole in your hand, but you couldn't prove that there isn't. You say, “Oh *yeah* I could, because I don't *feel* a hole in my hand, and I don't *see* a hole when I move my hand.” Well, how do you know your feelings are true? And how do you know your sight is true when you move your hand?

For that matter, how do you know that I even exist and that I'm even talking to you all? Aliens could be programming me as stimuli into your brain. I could be an illusion. You could be dreaming, you could be hallucinating, or you could be *insane*. Perhaps you really *do* have a hole in your head, and for a moment you saw the truth and were sane, and all the rest of your life you were insane because you thought you were sane.

The truth is, we are all born with rather empty heads. A newborn baby receives all sorts of sensory input, but he doesn't know what any of the input is or what to do with it. The baby feels, tastes, smells, sees . . . but the baby has no categories for what he sees. So immediately the baby begins to “make sense” of his world. The baby begins to construct psychological maps. The mind connects the dots and ascribes meaning. And wherever there are holes, the mind begins to fill them in.

That's where optical illusions and mental illusions come in. Your mind is making assumptions about reality — “making sense” — but some of the sense is nonsense.

Maybe a lot of our sense is nonsense—illusion.

Of course, our most powerful weapon for making sense of our world is words. With words we define, categorize, and connect. In the beginning, Adam—man—gave names to all the animals. That's what humans do, put words on things: dog, cat, pig. That's what science does, names things and looks for patterns. However, there is absolutely no logical reason to believe that what

normally happens is true or even happens at all, since we're trusting our senses and using our brains to make labels and maps.

Well, we say a person is "grown up" when they've put a label on everything and made sense of their whole world. Of course, their world has no more wonder—it's boring and dead—and there are no surprises, by definition, for nothing can happen that doesn't fit in their grown-up head. They've named everything and therefore know what everything is.

Frederick Buechner tells about a crazy Zen monk who holds a stick in his hand and says, "What have I got in my hand?" The eager student searching for truth says, "A stick." At that, the monk hits the man on the head with it saying, "No . . . *that's* what it is."

Pilate says to Jesus, "What is truth?" and Jesus doesn't answer with words. He *is* the Word . . . and He is the Truth. Pilate says to Jesus, "What is truth?" and Jesus hits him over the head with it: Himself.

In Matthew 8, Jesus has just calmed the storm in the sea. Now verse 28 . . .

And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demoniacs met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.

If you say you can't believe in the existence of demons, let me ask you: Do you really want to live in a world where the only things that exist are things you can understand? For then there are no demons, yet there are also no persons . . . and no life, no love, no truth . . . in which case, you're insane and utterly alone.

Well anyway, these demoniacs were alone.

- They were isolated. Everyone was afraid to go near them. They were trapped with no way out.
- They were insane. The chaos from the sea was in their head. They lacked truth.
- They were dead. They lived among the tombs — no way, no truth, no life.

And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now a herd of many swine was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine." And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the swine; and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and perished in the waters.

People wonder: Why did the pigs have to die? I'm not sure, but . . .

Why did all those Old Testament sacrifices have to die?
Why did that lamb have to die when the leper was healed?

Why did the pigs drown in the sea?

Verse 33:

The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, and what had happened to the demoniacs. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood.

- They begged Jesus to leave, and Jesus is the **Way**. He is the way out of Hell. They are begging the Gate—the Door—to leave. In the Revelation, the gates of the eternal city are always open. Maybe Heaven is always open, and Hell is locked from the inside . . . by us. They begged the Way and the Truth to leave.
- Jesus is the **Truth** . . . not *a* truth, but *the* Truth. Whenever we choose to lie, whenever we choose denial, whenever we choose sin, we ask the Truth to leave. We ask Jesus to leave that place. I think that's an invitation for the father of lies to inhabit that place.
- They asked the Way, the Truth, and the **Life** to leave. They chose death—the tombs.

They asked the Logos to leave. “Logos” was the rich, Greek concept we usually translate “Word” but also means “reason,” “meaning,” “matter” — by whom and through whom all matter is created and sustained. Twenty-first century physicists call that light.

Well, the Gadarenes asked the Light, the Reason, the Word, the Way, the Truth, and the Life to *leave!* Now, let me ask you: Who's insane? The demoniacs, or the Gadarenes? It turns out both groups needed saving and were insane. But the demoniacs were closest to being sane, for they were the closest to knowing they were insane.

Perhaps you think you're going insane, but really you're going *sane*. I'm sure you are, if you've surrendered to Jesus.

Well, anyway, the Gadarenes ask Jesus to leave.

Why would they do that?

What's the matter?

Several years ago, I was helping my friend Scott pray for people after the evening worship service at Hollywood Presbyterian Church. A man came forward and shared about his struggle with homosexuality.

Scott started praying, and all at once, things got really weird: It was like an unseen force seized the man's body. Scott started commanding a demon to leave in Jesus' name, and soon the man was convulsing on the floor. Then all at once, the thing was gone, and the man was in his right mind. Another man came up, who had been through the same thing. He introduced his wife and started telling the first man about the love of Jesus.

It was the first time I had ever seen a person delivered of a demon. I remember I was *terrified* . . . not of demons, but of Jesus. I could no longer view reality the same, persons the same, sin the same, Jesus the same, or myself the same. It was all too *real*, and I was desperate for denial. I earnestly longed to watch TV. It felt like someone had just taken my map of reality and changed all the names, redrawn all the lines, and turned 2-D into 3-D. The someone was *Jesus*. He had *freaked me out* . . . and it wouldn't be the last time.

So the Gadarenes asked Jesus to leave.

Why?

What's the matter?

Well, for one thing, He just ran 2,000 pigs into the sea. Mark and Luke also recount this event and tell us the herd numbered about 2,000. Pigs in Colorado are selling for about \$55.20 a head. That means Jesus just ran \$110,400 of bacon, ham, and pork chops into the sea. And remember, these people probably existed on something like a dollar or two a day. Jesus ran their entire economy and livelihood into the sea. And they ask Jesus to leave. Why? — They loved pigs more than people, and their business more than Jesus. Can you imagine that?

According to the World Health Organization, 1.2 billion people in our world live on less than \$1.08 a day.

20 million have died from AIDS in Africa

28 million more have the disease

32 million African children are projected to be orphaned by 2010 due to AIDS

According to the last *National Geographic*, there are more people enslaved today than were enslaved in four centuries of the transatlantic slave trade.

Americans spend \$20 billion a year on pets: dogs, cats, and pigs. With what we feed our pets, we could feed the world and have millions of dollars left over. Think about that at brunch . . . while you eat your bacon.

If you're like me, you want to discredit all those figures and deny any truth in them. But whenever we deny the truth, we deny Jesus, for Jesus *is* the Truth. Perhaps you *can* save your bacon, but you'll go insane. And maybe we're all a bit insane.

Dr. Karl Meninger wrote, "Generous people are very rarely mentally ill" — as if giving is, like, *therapy* for insanity!

You know, an insane person is like a universe unto themselves — a very *small* universe, for everything is about them: their needs, their wounds, their dreams, their perceptions. Everything is about them in such a way that they are *all that matters*. Their heart is encased in self. But when one person gives to another person, it's almost as if "where your treasure is there is your heart also." So then, give to a person, and your heart enters another universe full of other wounds, dreams, perceptions, longings, and opinions.

A person is the breath of God in clay.

You know, it's much easier to fit a dog, cat, or pig into your universe than a person. People are just too big. And maybe that's why we sometimes like dogs more than people. And maybe that's why we sometimes treat people like dogs . . . or treat demoniacs like pigs. We're trying to *make sense* of them: name them, define them, reduce them, and fit them into our universe. But when everything has become part of our universe, we're insane, everything dies, and we have no way out.

No way, no truth, no life = no Jesus.

Now, I'm not saying you can simply save someone by killing your dog. Only Jesus can save a person. Only Jesus delivered the demoniacs. But in the process, He sacrificed the pigs, I suppose to reveal the Gadarenes hearts, perhaps to even help them give and become sane — to lose their bacon and gain their sanity.

The truth is, Jesus made those pigs and can make more if He wants. The truth is, God can heal every African of AIDS as I speak. The truth is, God can still part the sea and set all the slaves free tonight. The truth is, God can still do the manna thing and feed the whole world.

But I don't think He will . . . *yet*. Jesus even said, "The poor you will have with you always." Maybe poverty, physical death, and illness aren't His chief concern, for they aren't the greatest danger. But we Gadarenes are in the greatest danger—a Hell of our own making—for we deny the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We think we are all that matters.

C. S. Lewis wrote:

Hell is a state of mind And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind—is, in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly.

Well, perhaps Jesus enters our insane, little, hellish world through another person in need — a pearl in which He is the gate. So you think it's only an old lunatic in a cave, or one of "those homosexuals," or just your wife or your kids, but He sneaks in and calls to you from their wounds: "Leave your little world. Sacrifice your pigs for me. Sacrifice your perceptions,

judgments, and treasure for me. For there is more to reality than just you."

God became small and descended into this world as a baby in a manger. Perhaps God can become small and descend into *your* world through another person. I think that was the real problem the Gadarenes had with Jesus: Not just that they lost 2,000 pigs, but that they gained two persons and Jesus, and they didn't fit in their world.

What was the matter? — that these demoniacs *mattered*.

In chapter 8, we have found that the leper mattered, the Roman centurion and his slave mattered, the mother-in-law mattered. Now we find that naked, masochistic, violent, pagan, Gentile demoniacs dwelling in tombs on the other side of the sea *matter* . . . a lot! That can really blow the Hell out of your map of reality! . . . maybe it's supposed to.

Mark and Luke record that at least one of the demoniacs was constantly naked, supernaturally strong, and incredibly violent to himself and others. The townspeople stayed away for their physical safety. I think they also stayed away for their *mental* safety. The demoniacs were physically quarantined and mentally quarantined — judged, named, and categorized as pigs. “Surely they deserved it. Surely it was their own fault. Surely they aren’t even *human* any more. They don’t matter.”

I believe that in two and a half weeks in our country, while we go trick-or-treating, babies will be ritually sacrificed . . . and children will be raped by people controlled by demons. And now most of you desperately want to deny what I just said. OK, but:

- How do you deny 6 million ritually murdered in Nazi Germany?
- How do you deny 60 million slaughtered in the former Soviet Union?
- How do you deny genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, and around the world?

How? Well, we try to think of them as less than people, for if they don’t really matter, evil doesn’t really matter . . . or perhaps it’s not really evil, but their own fault and their own doing. But to think that people like me are truly afflicted with evil . . . or *I* may be afflicted with evil . . . and what can I do about all the evil? . . . it’s all so hard to take!

I want to deny it, because I can’t make sense of it or sense of myself or sense of God. I can’t connect the dots, and if I try, I go insane. Yet when I deny that evil, I deny the good that it feeds on. I deny the babies, the children, the demoniacs, and me. And when I deny that evil, I deny the good that defines evil and overcomes evil. When I deny the crucifixion, I deny Easter.

I told you that the night at Hollywood Presbyterian wasn’t the last time Jesus freaked me out. I’ve seen Jesus deliver folks of demons many times since. I’ve come to know one of those people like a sister. When she told me her stories, I desperately wanted to deny them. But I couldn’t deny them, because I saw they were true, and because I soon discovered that:

Jesus makes sense of nonsense.
 Jesus makes sanity of insanity.
 Jesus connects the dots.
 And I wanted to see Him do it.

Jesus still walks among the tombs setting people free. And when I watch Him do it in others, I find He also does it in *me*. He’s evangelizing me. Whatever Satan intends for evil, God intends for good and accomplishes in Jesus, for He has “born our griefs and carried our iniquities,” and He “makes all things new.”

He is the Word: that gives meaning to everything.

He is the Way: He is the door out of Hell.
 He is the Truth: and the Truth always sets you free.
 He is the Life: the Life that rises in the dead.

Don't ask Him to leave!

The Gadarenes did. They didn't want anything to do with the demoniacs, and they especially didn't want anything to do with Jesus. They just wanted their pigs back—their illusions back. They just wanted their old map of reality back. So they asked Him to leave. So what's the matter?

Jesus is the Matter. He is literally the Matter—the Way. He is the map to all reality, the Truth about everything and everyone, the Life, your next heartbeat, the Word, the Ultimate Adam who names all the animals and names you. He gives meaning to all reality.

Jesus is the Matter — not even *matter* is the matter. All matter rests on Word. Even quantum physicists are beginning to say so.

So whenever anyone says, "What's the matter?" answer honestly, "Jesus is the Matter. He's sovereign. He's the Lord, the only one I can complain to and wrestle with."

What's the matter?

Jesus is the Matter.

And I'm not the matter, the way I think I am.

My map of reality doesn't really matter, at least not the way I think it matters. That is, I can't make sense of the world. I have to lose my world, lose my life, lose my map, and then I'm lost and need to be found. But do I matter?

Jesus so matters that in terror I wonder, Do I matter? and how? I've denied Him, ignored Him, attacked Him. I'm like the demoniac, and worse, I'm like the Gadarenes.

The Gadarenes ask Him to leave, and He *does*. Yet they're not abandoned . . . because Jesus commissions His first evangelist, and it's not who we'd expect. Mark and Luke record that Jesus tells the demoniac to stay and be His witness to the town, of how much God had done for Him, how much he mattered to God. And how much was that? Well, he was worth at least 2,000 pigs.

Perhaps that's why Jesus cast the demons into the pigs: to show how much the demoniac was worth . . . and not just in pig's blood, but His own blood. Perhaps the pigs were a sacrifice. They were unclean to Jews, but the Gadarenes were Gentiles, and all they had was unclean.

The pigs absorb the evil like a sponge and "perish in the abyss." They absorb the evil like a lamb in the temple would absorb sins before it was sacrificed. According to Scripture, apart from Christ we are all slaves of evil spirits, and children of wrath.

- On the cross, Jesus absorbed the wrath and the curse.
- On the cross, Jesus disarmed the principalities and powers.

- On the cross, Jesus redeemed us, paid for us.
- On the cross, Jesus—Lamb of God—the Sacrifice—absorbed our sin and evil and sank into the abyss, perished in the sea, to set us free.

You are worth far more than 2,000 pigs.
You are worth the blood of the only begotten Son of God.

Some years ago, Susan and I were praying with my friend who'd been raised in a coven. A demon had manifested in her body. It took the name of a man, who unbeknownst to her had purchased her in an evil covenant when she was a young woman. Jesus broke that covenant with His eternal covenant.

I commanded the demon to leave. It mocked me and said, "I don't have to leave. I paid for her." At that I took the communion cup filled with wine, that is, blood. I held it in front of the demon and her face, and I said, "What's worth more: that amount of money, or the blood of the only begotten Son of God?" The demon screeched in horror, "*The blood!*" and was gone.

Do you matter? Well . . .

- The Matter died for you and gives His life's blood to you, and so lives inside of you. Yes! You could not matter more!
- You matter, but not by works. You matter by grace. So don't worry!
- You matter because you matter to Him.
- You matter, and through this world He's showing you how much you matter. He bears every sorrow, sin, evil, and shame to the abyss for the love of you.

You can't make sense of your world, but surrender it, and He makes sense of you and gives His world to you. He gives Himself to you. Yes, it's freaky at times, but don't ask Him to leave.

On the night He was betrayed, sitting at table with His disciples, He took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body which is for you. Take and eat in remembrance of me." And in the same way after supper, He took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me. I tell you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Do you matter to Him? Yes!
Do you want Him? Surrender your world.

You can't make sense of your self and your world, but Jesus longs to make sense of you and give you His world. In Jesus' name, believe it: You could not matter more.

“May the eyes of your heart be enlightened and may you know the incredible grace of His power at work in us who believe.” And if you think, “Oh, that’s weak,” be prepared to be freaked out . . . if not in this world, when you stand before Him one day.

It’s *not* weak. There is no greater power. You are being wakened up slowly from a bad dream called a fallen world, and a curse, and an Evil Dragon. You’re going sane, and that may feel a bit insane at times. But when all Hell breaks loose, don’t fear. And don’t ask Him to leave. Don’t deny Truth; don’t run from Truth. Truth is your friend and your Savior.

Years ago I was riding on a ski lift with my son and daughter, and I was thinking, “I really need to have the birds and bees talk with my kids.” My daughter was asking some leading questions, so I jumped on the opportunity. “Well, let me tell you where you came from and how God made mommies and daddies, and men different from women . . . it’s a little bit weird, but it’s really wonderful, because they’re joined together in a covenant that bears fruit . . . and one day I hope that’ll happen for you . . . it’s really a wonderful thing . . . in fact, physically it’s about the greatest ecstasy you could ever experience . . .”

My son turned to me and said, “Dad, could we talk about something else? You’re freaking me out!”

Bride of Christ, if He’s freaking you out, it’s *freaky good!* Don’t ask Him to leave. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Further Reading

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

-John 14:6

Reason’s last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it. It is merely feeble if it does not go as far as to realize that. If natural things are beyond it, what are we to say about supernatural things?

-Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*

“Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Supermen. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums.” . . . The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason. . . . Perhaps the nearest we can get to expressing it is to say this: that his mind moves in a perfect but narrow circle. A small circle is quite as infinite as a large circle; but, though it is quite as infinite, it is not so large. In the same way the insane explanation is quite as complete as the sane one, but it is not so large.

-G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

To a visitor who described himself as a seeker after truth the master said, “If what you seek is truth, there is one thing you must have above all else.”

“I know. An overwhelming passion for it.”

“No. An unrelenting readiness to admit you may be wrong.”

-Anthony DeMello, *Anthony DeMello*

This tendency to avoid problems and the emotional suffering inherent in them is the primary basis of all human mental illness. Since most of us have this tendency to a greater or lesser degree, most of us are mentally ill to a greater or lesser degree, lacking complete mental health. . . . Our view of reality is like a map with which to negotiate the terrain of life. . . . The process of making revisions, particularly major revisions, is painful, sometimes excruciatingly painful. And herein lies the major source of many of the ills of mankind. . . . Truth or reality is avoided when it is painful. We can revise our maps only when we have the discipline to overcome that pain. To have such discipline, we must be totally dedicated to truth. That is to say that we must always hold truth, as best we can determine it, to be more important, more vital to our self-interest, than our comfort. Conversely, we must always consider our personal discomfort relatively unimportant and, indeed, even welcome it in the service of the search for truth. Mental health is an ongoing process of dedication to reality at all costs.

-M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*

“Do not blaspheme. Hell is a state of mind—ye never said a truer word. And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind—is, in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly. For all that can be shaken will be shaken and only the unshakable remains.”

-C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

Everyone on earth bears a secret resentment toward everyone else, simply for being alive. . . . And it is obvious too that this hidden antagonism toward others is fundamentally an antagonism toward God, an anger against Him for all the pain and the maddening obscurity of life.

-Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*

“If all Hell’s miseries together entered the consciousness of yon wee yellow bird on the bough there, they would be swallowed up without trace, as if one drop of ink had been dropped into that Great Ocean to which your terrestrial Pacific itself is only a molecule.”

“I see,” said I at last. “She couldn’t *fit* into Hell.”

He nodded. “There’s not room for her,” he said. “Hell could not open its mouth wide enough.”

“And she couldn’t make herself smaller?—like Alice, you know.”

“Nothing like small enough. For a damned soul is nearly nothing: it is shrunk, shut up in itself. Good beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouths for food, or their eyes to see.”

“Then no one can ever reach them?”

“Only the Greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell. For the higher a thing is, the lower it can descend—a man can sympathise with a horse but a horse cannot sympathise with a rat. Only One has descended into Hell.”

-C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

-Galatians 4:3-6

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

-Ephesians 2:1-3

And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

-Colossians 2:13-15

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