

Sermon preached at OCC, 22 June 2025

Holy One, prepare us to receive your word. As we listen in faith and hope, open our souls to your quenching waters. Free us from the confinement of our hearts, that we may hear the promise of your love.

Luke 8:26–39

### ***From Terror to Wholeness***

Have you ever experienced something that felt like sheer terror at the time, yet somehow led you to healing or wholeness? Let's take a moment to reflect or even share with someone nearby. I'll start with a few examples.

In real life, Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years under brutal conditions. Instead of emerging bitter, he led South Africa through a peaceful transition and promoted forgiveness and unity, becoming a global symbol of reconciliation. Another example is Peter in the Bible, who denied Jesus three times out of fear. Yet when the crow cried a third time, he remembered Jesus' words and wept bitterly. Later, he became the leader of the church to deliver Jesus' good news. Both stories reflect the image of the 'wounded healer'—someone who has either suffered terror or caused it yet is transformed into a vessel of wholeness.

In today's reading, we encounter terror and wholeness together in one setting. The word *terror* in Greek is either *fobeo*—to fear (v.35)—or its noun form *fobos*, meaning fear or terror (v.37). *Wholeness*, in contrast, is expressed by the verb *sozo*—to save or to heal. This is not just physical recovery, but restoration of spirit, soul, and body. Those who meet Jesus and experience His authority encounter either terror or wholeness. This dynamic is not confined to the past—it remains deeply relevant today. 'Terror' can take many forms that threaten us, and 'wholeness' is something we long for amid life's struggles. Let's examine the story's depictions of terror first and then reflect on the possibility of transformation.

### **The Man's Terror (*fobos*)**

The demon-possessed man is a personification of terror itself. His body, mind, and spirit are in torment. When Jesus commands the impure spirit to come out, the man cries out, "Do not torment me!"—a striking reversal, as the demonic presence sees Jesus as a threat. For the man,

Jesus is a menace—someone who might erase the identity he’s come to inhabit, however painful.

Demonic oppression appears throughout Jesus’ ministry. In God’s kingdom, what is distorted is restored. In the Bible, demons often drive victims toward self-destructive behaviour, isolating them from family, community, and even themselves. Today, we might describe ‘demons’ as forces that distort our lives—addiction, trauma, shame, fear—that prevent us from becoming who God created us to be.

When Jesus asks the man’s name, he replies, “Legion”—a Roman military term for thousands of troops. It’s a chilling image: one person overwhelmed by countless forces. As such, his life is not only terror to himself but also to his community.

### ***The Town’s Terror***

Yet the story doesn’t end with the man. When Jesus drives the demons into the pigs, and the pigs rush into the lake and drown, something unexpected happens. The townspeople are filled with fear—not relief, not joy. They see the man “clothed and in his right mind,” sitting calmly at Jesus’ feet—and they are afraid.

Why? Because their economy has just suffered a blow. Their livestock is gone. The healing of the man has cost them something dear. Imagine how farmers would respond if all their animals were lost in a moment. For them, Jesus’ saving power feels like a disaster—an uninvited disruption. His miracle is as threatening as a natural disaster. This prompts us to reflect: Are we afraid of God’s healing because it may shake the foundations of our comfort or control?

So here is the paradox: the same act of healing is *wholeness* for the man but *terror* for the town. What makes something terror or wholeness? The answer lies in how we choose to respond.

### ***Our Choice – Wholeness (sozo) or Terror***

The healed man experiences wholeness in two ways. First, the legion of demons leaves him. Second, he is given the chance to return to the community. Yet, this restoration does not unfold easily. The townspeople are not ready to receive him. Their fear still lingers. Though the chains

and shackles are gone, he remains at a distance from them—separated by fear, suspicion, and perhaps resentment. His healing has exposed their vulnerability.

Still, Jesus sends him back—to the very people who once banished him—as if to plant a seed in hard soil. The man becomes a living testimony of God’s saving power. He is called to embody wholeness even in a place where fear still reigns. Initially, we might assume terror is always visible—like a wild man in chains. But what about the hidden terrors that reside in our hearts: judgment, bitterness, pride, or grief? How do we respond when Jesus disrupts our lives with healing that challenges our comfort?

### *Today’s Choice*

In today’s world, we often see more signs of terror than of wholeness. Yet Luke’s passage tells us that terror isn’t just something that happens to us—it can also be our response to grace. We are invited to choose wholeness in the presence of terror.

As Christians, we entered into wholeness through baptism, receiving Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Yet we know that our frail bodies and wandering souls don’t always reflect that reality. We live into wholeness daily—not because we are perfect, but because Christ perfects us through worship, prayer, community, and His Word.

Like the man who was healed, we are sent to testify to what God has done in our lives. We often say “God is love” or “God is healing”—but to say that truthfully means living it. It means embodying that love so others may also be made whole. May we be people who carry wholeness into the world—even when it disrupts the familiar—because the healing Jesus brings is worth everything. Amen.