**“My Name is Legion; What’s Yours?”**

**Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39**

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Some of you are likely familiar with ***Rachel Held Evans*** (June 8, 1981 – May 4, 2019) who was an American Christian columnist, blogger and author. Her book, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood,* was a [*New York Times* bestseller](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_York_Times_Best_Seller_list) in e-book non-fiction, and, *Searching for Sunday,* was a *New York Times* bestseller nonfiction paperback.

In September 2008, Evans signed with [Zondervan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zondervan) for her first book, *Evolving in Monkey Town*. (She grew up and went to College in Dayton, Tennessee). The book explores her journey from religious certainty to a faith which accepts doubt and questioning; the title is based on the [Scopes Monkey Trial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scopes_Monkey_Trial) that took place in Dayton.

Her second book, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling Her Husband Master*, was published in October 2012. She recounts how she spent an entire year of living a Biblical lifestyle *literally.* In 2014, Evans re-released *Evolving in Monkey Town* with the new title of *Faith Unraveled*.

In 2015, she wrote a column in [*The Washington Post*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Washington_Post): *"Want millennials back in the pews? Stop trying to make church 'cool.'"* In the column she self-identified as a [millennial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials), and expressed her belief that while churches in the United States are attempting to get more millennials in the church, their approach is wrong because they focus primarily on *stylistic aspects*, which she believed *"are not the key to drawing millennials back to God in a lasting and meaningful way. Young people don't simply want a better show* … [*Contrary to popular belief, we (millennials) can't be won back with hipper worship bands, fancy coffee shops, or pastors who wear skinny jeans.*](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1413510)*”*

*“I told them we’re tired of the culture wars, tired of Christianity getting entangled with party politics and power. Millennials want to be known by what we’re for, I said, not just what we’re against. We don’t want to choose between science and religion or between our intellectual integrity and our faith. Instead, we long for our churches to be safe places to doubt, to ask questions, and to tell the truth, even when it’s uncomfortable. We want to talk about the tough stuff—biblical interpretation, religious pluralism, sexuality, racial reconciliation, and social justice—but without predetermined conclusions or simplistic answers. We want to bring our whole selves through the church doors, without leaving our hearts and minds behind, without wearing a mask.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

*“I explained that when our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender friends aren’t welcome at the table, then we don’t feel welcome either, and that not every young adult gets married or has children, so we need to stop building our churches around categories and start building them around people.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

*“We millennials have been advertised to our entire lives, so we can smell B.S. from a mile away. The church is the last place we want to be sold another product, the last place we want to be entertained.” [[3]](#footnote-3)*

She believed that while the church is acting in good faith in their efforts to bring millennials back to the church, they too frequently use misguided strategies to do so.

Held was attracted to what she called “*ancient church”*and attended [St. Luke's Episcopal Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Luke%27s_Episcopal_Church_%28Cleveland%2C_Tennessee%29) in Cleveland, Tennessee. At the time of her death, she no longer considered herself to be an [evangelical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelicalism) due to its close association with the [Christian right](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_right) in the United States.

Emma Green, writing for [*The Atlantic*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Atlantic) notes that Evans *"was part of a vanguard of progressive-Christian women who fought to change the way Christianity is taught and perceived in the United States."*Green goes on to argue that Evans' legacy is *"her unwillingness to cede ownership of Christianity to its traditional conservative-male stewards"* and that her *"very public, vulnerable exploration of a faith forged in doubt empowered a ragtag band of writers, pastors, and teachers to claim their rightful place as Christians."*

I want you to think about these things in terms of our texts from Galatians and Luke this morning. You see, the Jewish followers of Jesus in Jerusalem’s early church were in crisis. Should they admit gentiles (non-Jews; mostly pagan) into their fellowship? Could gentiles be followers of Jesus; the one they believed to be the Jewish Messiah? Resolution of these questions did not come easily, but finally the Jewish followers of Jesus swallowed their pride and begrudgingly allowed the gentile outsiders to come into the fold. Their guidelines seemed fair enough: all the new converts had to do was to be circumcised and follow the laws of Judaism. But it wasn’t quite that simple.

Paul responded to their actions in a letter to the Galatians. He told the Jerusalem Christians that their welcome did not go far enough. The gentiles did not have to subscribe to all the Jewish regulations, he insisted. All these gentiles had to do was be *baptized* and affirm Jesus as Lord. It was a new day. Even these non-Jews were children of God with no strings attached.

Paul said that all the *old categories* they had followed all their lives were too confining. What about *ethnic* or *religious* divisions, they asked? Paul said *no.* Surely, they said, *socioeconomic forces* must be taken into consideration. Paul shook his head. They persisted: don’t tell us that *gender differences* don’t matter. For a third time Paul said *no.* What followed was absolutely subversive. *“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

It’s a story about l*iberation* … freedom!

In a similar way, In Luke 8, we read about a naked man who has plagued the people of Gerasa with his unruly behavior. Although the townspeople have tried to lock up the demon-possessed man “with chains and shackles,” he has always been able to overpower them. Unable to restrain him, yet unwilling to submit to a demonic force they cannot control, the Gerasenes have managed to push him away to the place where they feel that he belongs—on the very edge of society, amidst the tombs, out of sight, out of mind, as good as dead. They have not solved the problem, but they have succeeded in brushing it far enough aside to establish an uncertain peace.

When Jesus arrives, this precarious balance is upset. Con­fronted by the presence of the Holy One, the demon-possessed man falls at Jesus’ feet and cries out, identifying the rabbi in ways no ordinary human has yet discerned: *“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”* Jesus demands the demons’ name, claiming authority over *the Legion* yet granting the evil spirits’ request to enter a herd of pigs. The pigs rush down the bank and drown, *symbolically* returning the spirits to their primordial realm—the realm over which Jesus has just asserted his power in the stilling of the storm (8:22–25).

But instead of restoring order to the region, Jesus’ actions bring chaos. Understandably upset, the swine-herders run into the city to share news of their economic loss. And when the townspeople see the wild one sitting in his right mind, those who have long suffered his terrors are filled with a new sort of fear. The pig farmers explain to the crowd how the healing has taken place, and the people collectively ask Jesus to leave.

Some­times *the terror we know* is more tolerable than *the peace we cannot imagine.*

According to the historian *Josephus,* in AD 66 the Roman army brutalized the people of Gerasa as part of its campaign against the Jewish rebels during the First Jewish-Roman War. A legendary Roman legion of 5,000 soldiers would have been overkill, but a smaller cohort may have been responsible for the Gerasene slaughter.

Regardless, Luke’s readers must have recognized what the demons’ name represented, making the association between *demonic possession* and *brutal military occupation.* In the exorcism, Jesus reveals his power not only over the demons who belong in the sea but also over the empires of this world.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Again, (like Galatians) it’s a story about *freedom from oppression, liberation, freedom!*

As Rachel Held Evans said in commenting on the nature of Scripture:

*“If you are looking for verses with which to support slavery, you will find them. If you are looking for verses with which to abolish slavery, you will find them. If you are looking for verses with which to oppress women, you will find them. If you are looking for verses with which to liberate or honor women, you will find them. If you are looking for reasons to wage war, you will find them. If you are looking for reasons to promote peace, you will find them. If you are looking for an outdated, irrelevant ancient text, you will find it. If you are looking for truth, believe me, you will find it. This is why there are times when the most instructive question to bring to the text is not "what does it say?", but "what am I looking for?" I suspect Jesus knew this when he said, "ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened." If you want to do violence in this world, you will always find the weapons. If you want to heal, you will always find the balm.”[[6]](#footnote-6)*

Friends, the lesson this morning—from both Galatians and Luke--is that we too live between *the tyrannical powers of this world* and *the freedom of God’s imminent reign.* Accepting the freedom that Jesus brings us may cost us our place in the empire and the security that it provides. Confronted with that choice, we are tempted to push Jesus away, to ask him to take his revolutionary actions elsewhere. We are tempted to maintain our allegiance to the lesser powers that threaten us rather than embrace the overwhelming power that liberates us. But when we do this, we side with oppression.

The Gerasene exorcism forces us to ask whether we are the ones using shackles and chains to imprison those whose freedom threatens us *or are we agents of liberation from oppression for those who are yearning to be free*?

*It’s our choice.*

1. Rachel Held Evans, [Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/42042272) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Roger Lovette, *“One Little Word: Galatians 3:23-29,”* The Christian Century, June 15, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Evan G. Garner, *June 23rd, Ordinary (12C), Luke 8:26-39,* The Christian Century*,* May 28, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Rachel Held Evans, [A Year of Biblical Womanhood](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/19108809) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)