



Best left alone?

Heather Smith *reflects on* Luke 8:26-39

If you've ever embarked on a small alteration to your home, you might know how the work can quickly spiral. Perhaps you just want to move a few electrical sockets, but you don't want the wiring to be visible, so you end up with patches of plaster on the wall. Now you have to do some painting, but you can't match the existing colour, so you have to paint the whole room – and you end up wishing you'd just left the sockets where they were.

Things were pretty bad for the Gerasene demoniac. His problems (or demons) were legion. But even though Jesus had tried to heal him, he screamed to be left alone. No matter how bad things are, sometimes it seems safer not to make any changes.

The demoniac's problems were making things difficult for others, too. He had to be kept under guard and shackled, but sometimes he even managed to escape his chains. In the end, the solution was to send the demons into a herd of pigs, where they made things so difficult that the pigs ran off a cliff and drowned. This in turn made things difficult for the swineherds, who were both unhappy and extremely frightened.

So was it all worth it? Everyone had quite an experience and some valuable pigs were lost. But a suffering and excluded man was returned, healthy, to his community. 🙏

God, your healing in our lives is worth any amount of trouble and upheaval, even when it seems less disruptive and easier to leave things as they are. Teach us to accept and embrace your healing. Amen.



Walking with Rosie

God all around

by Gillian Cooper

Rosie and I are on holiday in Orkney, where the days are long and bright, and our hosts warm and welcoming. Our walks take us along springy grass paths to windswept beaches. The sea is turquoise, birds swoop and swim, and seals pop up their heads to greet us. Of course, our walks also take us to coffee, cake and dog biscuits.

In Orkney, faith seems easy, almost inevitable. God is in the rocks and in the moorland, in the ancient remains of mysterious long-ago people, in the clear soft light and the reflections on the lochs, in the skill of the craftspeople and in the stories and traditions of the islands. The benign spirit of St Magnus hovers over the pilgrims who walk his Way to the magnificent cathedral that bears his name. Here I rejoice to find myself effortlessly in the presence of God. 🙏

Book review

by Julia McGuinness

Julia McGuinness looks at *Sacred Rhythms*, by Ruth Hayley Barton (IVP Books, 2006).

What does a Christian do when beneath the busy-ness of church, family and work life, an underlying unsatisfied hunger for God remains? This is the question the author faced.

Weary with striving and activity, she set about rearranging her life around core spiritual disciplines, reflecting monastic tradition by creating a "rule of life". This was less about achieving holiness, more about making space for God's transforming presence.

Sacred Rhythms introduces us to the practice of seven spiritual disciplines – from solitude to sabbath, prayer to honouring the body – followed by guidance on how to develop a rule of life for ourselves. Each chapter presents a discipline through the author's encounter with it. She shows what it might look like in practical everyday living, with examples from her own life and concluding with suggestions for us to try. The author stresses the importance of being real about what our hearts most long for in our relationship with God. She is engaging and honest in this down-to-earth book that makes traditional Christian disciplines accessible to our everyday lives. 🙏

“Tears shed for self are tears of weakness, but tears shed for others are a sign of strength.”

Billy Graham (1918-2018), evangelist