

# Arts & Faith

Art and Commentary for Pentecost +2, Proper 7C by [Hovak Najarian](#)

## Introduction

Greetings to everyone associated with St. Margaret's Sunday Morning Forum,

The Gospel for Sunday, June 19th is Luke 8:26-39. It describes a time when Jesus and his disciples went to Gerasenes by boat and upon arriving met a demon possessed man. The many demons within the man were aware they would be cast out by Jesus but they did not want to be sent to the abyss. They preferred to occupy beings, even swine. Their request to enter the swine on the hillside was granted but then the swine immediately jumped into the sea and drowned.

The art for this Sunday, *Jesus Casts Out Demons*, is a fifteenth century woodcut by an unknown artist. ~Hovak Najarian

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*Jesus Casts Out Demons*, 15<sup>th</sup> century woodcut. Artist unknown.

Commentary by Hovak Najarian



Jesus and his disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasenes by boat and upon setting foot on land they met a man in whom demons were residing. The man shouted to Jesus, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” Jesus asked, “What is your name?” The man said, “Legion” (because many demons were within him). The demons begged Jesus not to be sent back to the abyss, but to allow them to enter the swine on the hillside. Jesus, granted their wish. The demons left the man and entered the swine, but the swine then rushed promptly down the steep bank into the water and drowned.

In the woodcut above, Jesus seems relaxed and almost casual as he stands with two fingers pointing toward the man who is possessed and spewing demons from his mouth. The disciples see one swine with a demon in its mouth already in the water and watch others as they prepare to leap. .

We tend to speculate about things unknown and unfamiliar. Because of a lack of education and limited experiences, the people of medieval times faced many unknowns. Their bestiary – the animal kingdom – was full of real and imagined animals. Known animals had imagined attributes and imagined animals (often hybrids) were said to possess frightening powers. Embellished accounts and

superstitions found their way into lore and in beliefs of what would occur if they encountered some of these terrible beasts.

When artists depicted animals that were heard about through descriptions but not seen, they relied on their imaginations. In the depiction of devils and demons often even more imagination occurred. Images evolved as artists used various sources for reference and added characteristics that seemed reasonable. Lizards and serpents were associated with the devil and often reptilian characteristics such as a tail were incorporated into the features of demons. Beasts with horns were described in the Book of Revelation and it is likely this was the source of horns that were added. Sometimes demons were said to be “evil angels” and given bat-like wings. Other features included sharp claws, sharp teeth, and barbs. Today, we are so accustomed to seeing caricatures of devils and demons that depictions from the Middle Ages may seem almost cartoon-like.

During the early fifteenth century, a woodcut was the medium of choice when artists wished to make multiple copies of a picture. In order to make a woodcut, an artist would begin typically with a drawing that is transferred to the surface of a flat, smooth, and even-grained piece of wood. When a drawing is transferred, the artist must keep in mind that when an inked block is printed, the image will be the reverse (a mirror image) of the relief surface. When *Jesus Casting Out Demons* was being carved, Jesus and the man beside him were on the left side of the block and the swine leaping into the sea were on the right.

To prepare this woodcut, the print-maker carved out everything around the contour lines that were drawn on the block’s surface. After the cutting was complete, all that remained of its original surface were lines left as ridges. The rest of it was cut away below the surface in order that ink would not reach it when a brayer (a roller used to transfer ink from a palette to the relief surface) was used. After the block was inked, paper was placed on its surface and pressed. When the paper was lifted, the ink was lifted and the process was complete.

After *Jesus Casting Out Demons* was printed, portions of it – demons, earth, and hair – were enhanced with brown ink washes. [To make a *wash*, ink is thinned with water and applied with a brush.] The sky was given a blue tint with the white of the paper left un-tinted in areas to suggest clouds and a halo for Jesus.

Note: Jesus’ hand gesture of two fingers pointing (as seen in the woodcut above) was derived from Roman orators. It indicates a person has begun to speak and the audience should pay attention.

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