

A NOTE TO PARENTS

Today's story from Luke is the strange episode with the "Gerasene demoniac"—the wild man who challenges Jesus, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" And when Jesus heals him, by driving the demons into a herd of pigs, the townspeople are terrified and beg him to leave them.

This issue of *The Sunday Paper Junior* does not present the story in detail, but focuses on the concept that God may be felt as *scary* as well as *awesome* and *loving*. The "fear of the Lord" and the fearsomeness of God are frequent themes in Scripture, and have certainly been part of Christian spirituality, and Christian education of children, throughout the church's history. Too often, this has taken the form of deliberately presenting a picture of a wrathful God, in order to induce children to be "good." And, too often, it has been successful in scaring children out of their wits, though not necessarily in inducing the desired good behavior. It's not surprising that in recent generations, the trend has been in the opposite direction—to present an image of God as entirely kindly and safe.

We believe that *God is love*. But it is abundantly clear from both scripture and experience that God's love is not necessarily "safe." When we promise our children—explicitly or implicitly—that God's love means that nothing bad will ever happen to them, we are making a promise on which we cannot deliver. We are setting them up for disappointment, disillusionment, and loss of faith in both us and God. For many children, we are also setting them up to be bored and blasé, especially after the age of 8 or 9. Children know perfectly well that much of the wonder and beauty in God's universe is very far from safe or tame. They love dinosaurs and outer space; scary stories and heroic moral struggle. Why should they get excited about a God who *only* deals in warm fuzzies, and never challenges them to face the darkness, undertake a difficult task, exult in the majesty of the universe, or learn through pain and loss to grow strong and compassionate?

The true dimensions of God's love are shown in the image of Jesus on the cross. God enters our world, shows his love by walking with us through all the pain and weakness, trouble and loss, that attend the human condition, and invites us to pick up our own cross and follow him through death to victory.

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Year C
PROPER 7
TRACKS 1 and 2

After Jesus healed the man who was out of his mind, the village leaders were terrified!

LUKE 8:37



SOMETIMES GOD'S POWER CAN FEEL SCARY.



Sometimes, after they saw Jesus do something amazing, people felt scared. They thought of God's awesome power, and it made them feel small and unsafe. But Jesus reminds us that God's LOVE is the most powerful thing of all.

Connect the dots to see what shows God's love.

