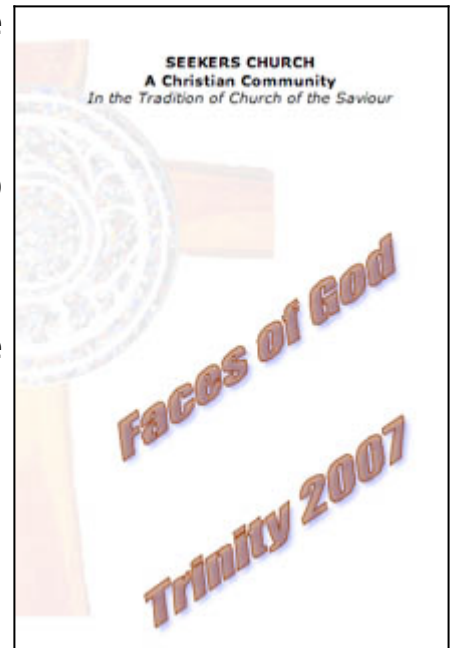


Dreamers With Big Dreams by Lia Scholl

As the introductions told you, my name is Lia Scholl and I run a growing non-profit that ministers to exotic dancers. The short of it is that I train women to be chaplains in strip clubs. Those women, organized in teams, visit the clubs regularly, and provide friendship to the dancers.



My friend Star called me about two weeks ago about 6:30 in the evening. Star is a former dancer. The club she worked in was what I would refer to as a more hard-core club. It was rough. "How are you?" I asked. "I'm okay," she said. "Today I ran into the owner from the club where I used to work. He asked me to come back to work." "What did you say?" I asked. "I told him to look at me, I've gained weight, I couldn't do it. He then went on and said that I look great, and that I could still dance. But if I wanted to, I could bartend."

I asked Star if she wanted to do it. She said she did. The money is just so good, it's hard to say no.

Star called me later that night. At 12:23, to be exact. She had just slit her wrists, and was reaching out to find someone to talk to.

I'd like to tell you a bit more about Star. She's beautiful, with lovely brown hair, gorgeous eyes. She's got a bubbly laugh. She's incredibly intelligent, too. She writes

beautifully, and she's an amazing reader of people. She lights up a room when she walks in. And funny! She is a funny, funny woman, with one of those amazing personalities where she can laugh at herself, and turn even painful stories into rolling laughter.

In fact, even that night, sitting with her wrists bleeding, Star was telling me of her latest issues with the medical system, and she started laughing, "I need an executive assistant," she laughed. Her job now is as an executive assistant.

You see, Star suffers from chronic depression. She's tried to commit suicide several times. And this time, she didn't want to go back to the hospital. She wanted to either die or stay around for the weekend, when she was going to take her daughter on a trip. The hospital was out of the question.

We talked for a few minutes. I begged her to call 911. She refused. We talked about what was going on with her, why she was feeling like she wanted to end it. I asked her if she was still bleeding, she at first said no. Then I asked her again, and she said yes. I asked her if she had bandages. She didn't. I asked her again to call 911. She refused. I asked her address, knowing that I was talking to her on a cell phone, not a landline, and she said, "Goodbye, Lia." And hung up the phone.

I had to follow up on it. I called the police in the city where she lives. They couldn't help, with just a cell phone number. I called a suicide hotline, thinking she may have called them that night, and they checked their records. She wasn't listed. There was nothing that I could do. I called her a couple of times, but she didn't answer. Finally, I sent her a text message. "I love you. Don't die."

I received a text message from Star the next morning. She had survived the night, and was heading to her therapist's office.

She survived this time.

I asked Star later if she thought that the offer from the strip club owner had anything to do with her suicide attempt. "Absolutely," she said, "it sent me right back to that feeling that I felt when I danced." "What was that feeling?" I asked. She answered, "Like a piece of sh (well you know the word)."

Our gospel text today is about Jesus meeting a man possessed with demons. The man met Jesus' boat practically screaming, "Leave me alone! Leave me alone!" Jesus sends the demons into a herd of swine (by the way, I'm not sure that PETA would like Jesus). The man gets dressed, sits at Jesus' feet, and the people of the town become fearful of Jesus. He leaves the town. Legion asks Jesus if he can follow, but Jesus sends him back to his home.

The text leaves more questions for me than it answers. Why was Jesus heading into this town?

And why did he send the demons into the pigs? Aside from the literary significance of sending the demons into what the Jewish people considered the most filthy animal, I can't see why Jesus would send the demons into pigs.

And then, why wouldn't Jesus let the healed man follow him? Did he assume that the man had other things he needed to attend to? Did he know that his public ministry was winding down and that the next few weeks and months would be very difficult? Did he think that the man might be too much for the disciples to take on? Did he think that God's glory would be better served by having the man stay in his home town?

And then there are questions about the townspeople, too. Why weren't they excited to see the man healed? Why were they so afraid of Jesus? And how dispassionate could the townspeople have been to make the poor man stay in the graveyard chained up? And for a really practical question, how did he eat? Did the people of Gerasene just not understand Legion? Were they

afraid of him?

The text leaves a lot of questions for me about the man, too. Why was he in the graveyard? And I wonder, did he feel like my friend felt when she was dancing? Did he feel like a piece of sh (well, you know the word)?

If we start with a presupposition that we cannot necessarily DO what Jesus DID, but instead, that Jesus points us to understanding WHO GOD IS, then what lessons do we get from the healing of Legion?

We learn that our God is a compassionate God. Sure, it's sort of a no-brainer, but we always need to remember that our God is a loving and merciful God who wants the best for all humanity.

We also learn from our text that God is concerned with those who are on the outside—people who are hurting, alone, despised by those around them. We see this so many times in the Gospels—the woman at the well, the tax collector, the woman who anoints Jesus' head, the woman with the issue of blood. Time and time again Jesus touches, heals and loves these people. In fact, you wouldn't be far off if you assumed that God cares MORE about these children than others.

There's a song that's been running around in my head all week. It's called Drag Queens and Limousines, by Mary Gaulthier. It's an autobiographical song about running away from home, and the people she met. I'm going to do you a favor and not sing, but here is the first part:

I Hated High school, I prayed it would end.

The jocks and their girls, it was their world, I didn't fit in.

Mama said, "Baby, it's the best school that money can buy,

Hold your head up, be strong, c'mon Mary, try."

*I stole mama's car on a Sunday and left home for good,
Moved in with my friends in the city, in a bad neighborhood.
Charles was a dancer, he loved the ballet,
And Kimmy sold pot and read Keroac and Hemingway.*

It is that feeling, the "I didn't fit in" feeling that drives outsiders. It's what Star felt, no, feels on a regular basis. It is what Legion felt, that drove him to run into the wild. And like the people of Gerasene, we want to package off those people, send them out of our sight, and fear anyone who wants to bring them back into the fold. Mary Gaultier brings it back around at the end of the song, talking about the people that make her feel loved and accepted:

Sometimes you gotta do, what you gotta do

And hope that the people you love, will catch up with you.

Yea Drag Queens in Limousines

Nuns in blue jeans

Dreamers with big dreams

Poets and AWOL marines

Actors and Bar Flys

Writers with Dark Eyes

Drunks that Philosophize

These are my friends

When people feel unloved by those around them, they go find people who will love them. Star explained a little bit more about how she felt when she ran into the owner of the club. She said, "Yes, I felt like sh (well, you know the word), but I also felt valuable and liked. A part of me understands that

I was liked for all the wrong reasons, but still, I felt liked." People in need are going to find someone who will care for them, anywhere that they can.

You see, there's three types of people in the story of Legion. There are those that don't care that this poor guy was chained up in a cemetery. Then there are those who have a vested interest in keeping Legion chained up. They are the ones that ran Jesus out of town because he healed him. And then there's the people like Jesus.

I believe that Jesus went to this place specifically to meet Legion. Why else would Jesus have gone to Gerasene? He didn't even make it into the town. He just met Legion, then left. I imagine that Jesus was pretty difficult to talk out of something that he had decided, so if he had been planning to go into the town, he would've gone. Instead, he leaves when the town asks him to. So, I think he was just there for Legion.

There are three types of people in Star's life, too. There are those who don't care. And there are those like her manager that have a vested interest in keeping her chained up. And then there's Jesus.

A Star Light team member wrote about her recent club visit:

"It is a struggle because I see how young these women are: 19? 20? 21?—and I want to help them. i mean really help them by taking their hands and leading them outside, into the light, and telling them how much they are valued and loved by a god who really cares about their insides, unlike the creepy old men in their workplace. but, they're in it; they have to play the game because it is what they do for a living. so we talk to them, for a minute. give them gifts. we fumble around a place where it's obvious we stick out. men talk to us, we say "uh huh" and walk away, searching for an available dancer to talk to. i want to be comfortable there, to walk up to the

owner and talk, to wait for a dancer to finish her set instead of thinking, "oh she's busy, maybe next month." She writes a little more, "mostly, i just want to get up on that stage and preach to the whole place."

It is following Jesus. May it ever be.

Lia Scholl is founder of Star Light Ministries, Inc. an outreach ministry to exotic dancers. The organization provides chaplaincy and mentoring to the young women who work in strip clubs. Their goal is to reach every exotic dancer in the United States with the message that she is loved by God and a person of worth. To learn more visit: www.starlight-ministries.org