

June 23, 2019 Second Sunday after Pentecost
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GOSPEL

Luke 8:26-39

The holy gospel, according to Saint Luke, the eighth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

²⁶Then [Jesus and his disciples] arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time, he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me” —²⁹for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) ³⁰Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. ³¹They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

³²Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding, and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. ³⁶Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Come back with me for a few moments into the landscape of the story we just heard. So much happened...in just a few paragraphs. I want to remember it together. Close your eyes if you like...Listen again for the word of God and for how God is at work in the world.

There was a man...outside a city beside the sea. It was on the other side from home...from Galilee...(Jesus is always going to the other side...) This man wasn't inside the city. He was completely alone...except he wasn't alone. That might have been better. Not just one demon...but a small army of demons was with him...in him. They owned him...which made him sick and frightening and strong. He would convulse with seizures. At first, they tried to bind him with chains...the people who had loved him...maybe hoping they could keep him close and care for him...But he would break the chains. Luke says that he was driven out into the wilderness by the spirits. When Mark tells about it...he says that he made his home among the tombs. The demons took him to live among the things we fear most...the things we cannot control or tame. No one felt like they could bring him back from that place. There was a line they could not or would not cross anymore to try to save him. He was lost.

But then there was a day when a small boat slid ashore with that gentle rush that a hull makes along the soft ground at the shore. And immediately, the demons knew. They knew that they weren't in control anymore.

Somehow, it is always the demons who recognize Jesus first. They know his name. Perhaps our instincts of self-preservation teach us to recognize the shape and scent and gait of our enemies even more quickly than our friends...because we need the extra time to prepare our defenses when our enemies are the ones who slouch along the horizon.

The demons in the man recognized their enemy...and rushed the boat as it came ashore...and it seems that Jesus was just as quick to recognize his

adversary...because even before they can call out to him, Jesus has commanded them to leave the man they are eating from the inside out.

They strike a strange deal with Jesus...to enter the herd of pigs nearby...which are then driven to their death...which makes you wonder...where the demons went next...? And what on earth the herders of the pigs thought as their livelihood went tearing off to drown in the sea?

What happens last of all is just as important as the wild cosmic drama that precedes it. Because the maybe-now-out-of-work swineherds go and tell others in the city and all around what happened...and everyone comes to see. And there is the man they had seen break chains...and who they saw from a distance...running naked in the woods. But here he was...looking and acting like them. And how did they feel?

Afraid. They felt afraid...and everyone they told felt afraid. And they told Jesus to go away. Because they didn't know what to do with that kind of power and transformation. They didn't know what to do with someone who went past the line they would cross to save someone. They didn't know what it meant that someone hopeless was brought back from the place beyond hope. They didn't know what to do with a world that worked by different rules than what they had been taught. And they told Jesus to get lost, too. Lost is something they could deal with.

And...interestingly...Jesus obliges them. And then he does something odd...he refuses to take the man who he has saved with him. He tells him that his job now is to go home to share the news of God's power and the new rules that there isn't a line you can cross beyond which there is no hope. He sends him back to people who are afraid of Jesus...and probably still afraid of him.

I can't imagine how hard that was. To realize that Jesus would deliver him from the demon...but not from the people who thought he was hopeless. I kind of wish Jesus had. Maybe Jesus knew that if he trusted people to love one of their own, they would do it. Maybe he knew that the man could offer his people a

testimony they could never accept from someone who came from the other side of the sea.

I hope the man was safe. I believe he was. Because Jesus rescued him from destruction, and I don't believe that he would have turned him over to destruction by a different weapon.

I believe that part of the healing Jesus offered was to return the man to his community. And I think that the whole community actually needed to be healed...needed to receive him to be whole. And I don't think that work ended when Jesus' boat slid back off that shore. Perhaps it had only begun.

Being a community isn't easy. It isn't one miraculous moment and then everything is wonderful. Being community means walking through hurt...naming it...being real and vulnerable and risking rejection by asking those who are close to us to do the hard work of loving us even when things aren't perfect...or forgiving us and letting us try again.

Jesus offered healing to one man that day...but it was healing for a whole community. Jesus heals us...not just me...not just you...us. He knows that healing and wholeness only really come in bulk. They are not labeled for individual retail sale.

And that makes them way harder...and way more important.

A few of us from the Missional River Listening Team got to see that first-hand yesterday when we went and took a tour of the Community First! Village south of Austin...which was born out of the ministry of Mobile Loaves and Fishes. It is a remarkable place, and I encourage you to volunteer or take a tour if you ever can. Community First! is a master-planned community of mobile homes and tiny houses with many other wrap-around services and activities...where over 200 people live. Most of them have been chronically homeless and live with disabilities. And they have more than a house when they move into Community First! They have home...which is to say, they have a community. They have each other. It is as if the founders of Mobile Loaves and Fishes saw

the people that had been chased into the wilderness...or among the tombs...and they simply said, "Fine. Then we live here now. With you." Like Jesus, they looked across a line into a land that many might have called Hopeless or Lost...and they decided to claim it and call it Home. When Jesus crosses a line into Hopeless and Lost he plants the flag of Love and refuses to give up on anyone. Not the chronically homeless, the demon-possessed, the forgotten and feared. And not us.

We need that love and healing today, like so many others. In a few minutes, as the offering is collected, there will be a Stephen Minister at the station by the cross...so you can come and ask for prayers for healing if you need them today. There will be music and prayer for as long as we need it.

Jesus is here...healing us and restoring us to one another. It is not easy. But it is the life into which we are called. You are not Hopeless. You are not Lost. You are Loved....with all of God's beloved children. Now and always. Amen.