

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (PROPER 7C)

Galatians 3:23-29, Psalm 42:1-7, Luke 8:26-39

June 19, 2016

St. Mark's-in-the-Valley Episcopal Church, Los Olivos, California

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Beyond the boundaries

Loving Creator, by the faithfulness of Jesus you brought salvation to our wayward world: draw us into harmony with your will, that we may find all things restored in him, our Risen Savior. Amen.

Based on the Additional Collects, The Church of England

Dorothy's line from the Wizard of Oz: "I don't think we're in Kansas anymore" would have been appropriate for Jesus and the disciples as they arrived in the country of the Gerasenes. Like Dorothy, they had been blown around by turbulent winds before stepping out a bit dazed and confused.

Jesus has left the comfort and familiarity of mainly Jewish territory for gentile territory – not an obvious destination for a Jewish teacher, were he to define himself in strict terms.

For Jesus, it became immediately clear this was not a visit with Munchkins, but with demons. The Gerasene demonic was a naked man living in the tombs and he, recognizing Jesus at once, fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him.

Jesus was not in Kansas

anymore but had ventured into the land of the unclean, the land of suspicion, fear, and violence – of tombs, demons and pigs – so revealing that there is absolutely no where that God is not willing to go to be with human beings who are struggling for life.

And, as is often the case, frankly, he wasn't welcome.

A bizarre and intense story....

And while no one is saying that Omar Mateen, the Orlando shooter, was possessed by demons, our more sophisticated language of psychological and sociological analysis has a lot to say about that figure in that other bizarre and intense story – among so many others crowding our media streams these days.

Before Jesus has moved from shore and not waiting for an introduction, the demonic cries

out at the top of his voice: “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”

Well, we just heard the story and we know that Jesus commanded the evil to depart. The legion of tormentors cannot survive. They enter a herd of pigs and rush over an embankment to drown in a lake.

The herd of pigs – a couple hundred thousand dollars worth of pork on the hoof – was destroyed with the demons. How often have we watched something of real value go over the cliff?

And we might think for a moment about how the man called himself “Legion,” defining himself by what was killing him, his failures, his deficits, his losses, his ailments, his pain, his captivity. Do we define ourselves in narrow ways like that? Especially as contrasted with our identity given in baptism as Christ’s own forever?

But the story is not over....

We might think that everyone rejoiced and praised God that this man, so painfully harassed and afflicted for years was set free.

Jesus has brought change. Things are different.

Good news.

Or is it?

When the people saw what happened, Luke tells us, “they were seized with great fear.” It was

an opportunity for negativity and reactivity.

They asked Jesus to leave them.

This part of this story always leaps off the page for me.

When do we close the door on God?

Leave us to our fears, our narrowness, our demons and destruction. Leave us to our familiar patterns – our ruts.

How much do we want everything to be the same? How much do we resist transformation? How little do we understand about who Jesus is and who God longs to be for us and for our church and our community and our world?

The man possessed by demons who met Jesus at the boat was naked and homeless and agitated and by the end of the story he was clothed and sheltered and joyous. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, writes: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

We live beyond the boundaries – in the land of tombs, demons and pigs – and much worse. But we are Christ’s own, we are clothed with who Christ is to do the works of God with God’s presence in us.

Krista Tippett, the host of *On Being* recently interviewed the Stanford brain surgeon, Dr. James Doty who said it this way: “Most of

us have a tendency to desire pleasure rather than pain. I think anyone who has lived a life — which means you have had pain and suffering — realizes that there is a gift in the pain and suffering, because what it allows you to do is to see the reality that this is part of life. And it's part of a meaningful life.

“And when you're able to take that pain and suffering and use it to not hide from the world, to use it not to be afraid of every interaction, but to use it to say, yes, it is hard sometimes, but I have learned so many lessons and have become more appreciative and have more gratitude, and see in so many examples how, in the face of the greatest adversity, people have shown their greatest humanity. And it's when you recognize this, that is when you're most proud of actually being part of the human species.”

He says, “I appreciate that every day, I have the capacity to, through my actions, improve the life of at least one person. And what we forget sometimes is even smiling at another person, which takes very little effort, for that person who receives that, it can mean an immense amount. And not to forget that these small, little actions, these little ripples, can actually end up creating a tsunami if each of us engage in them. Remember, when a person — and

we know this from the science — when a person sees another person engage in a positive behavior, they are many, many times more likely to engage in that behavior themselves. When they see another person act with kindness, and with generosity, and with gratitude....”

Dr. Doty's remarkable story is in his interview on the onbeing.org website. He concludes saying, “We are at the beginning of an age of compassion.”

“...as you know, we had an age of enlightenment, which had a profound effect on our human species. And I believe that ... the positive effect, of compassion in little pockets in society and how profound it can be ... as we manifest these little pockets of compassion and caring for the other, it is ultimately going to be recognized that this is the path that will lead us out of darkness into light.”

We cannot avoid what challenges us in these violent days, this season of uncertainty and instability.

Instead, we create opportunities for people to gain the strength they need through reconciling and reconnecting to all that God is as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of human lives. We build a connected community of insightful health, wholeness and maturity that welcomes an active,

creative, positive common life that serves others. We grow in awareness of how our whole lives are lives of ministry in the many places we go and in all we do and in all we are. And Christ works with us and through us at all times bringing grace to use for service from the heart, the intelligence and skill and resources we have received from God.

An Asian poet, Kuan Tao-Shen, wrote:

*Take a lump of clay,
Wet it, pat it,
Make a statue of you
And a statue of me
Then shatter them, clatter
them,*

*Add some water,
And break them and mold
them*

*Into a statue of you
And a statue of me.
Then in mine, there are bits
of you
And in you there are bits of
me.*

*Nothing ever shall keep us
apart.*

That is the life of Christ within us. That is our life of compassion and service in connection with all of humanity. Not Kansas, not Oz, not the land of Gerasenes, but here and now.

Amen.



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