

Proper 7

Luke 8:26-39

Father's day/ Juneteenth

June 19, 2022

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Jesus and his disciples arrive in the country of the Gerasenes, directly across the sea of Galilee from Magdala, the town Mary Magdalene was from. Mary Magdalene, if you remember, was someone who Jesus also freed from demons. But Gerasenes, this is new territory for Jesus. Gerasene is gentile territory. And this is the only time in Gospel of Luke when Jesus purposefully crosses into gentile territory. It is a signal that Jesus's meaning and his message have magnified.

So, here on the shore of Lake Galilee in Gerasene, in gentile territory, Jesus meets a man possessed by demons. The man is beset by so many demons that he doesn't know his own name. Instead he calls himself Legion for the legion of demons who have overtaken his greatest gift, his own identity. The man is raving, naked, homeless and alone...

so out of his mind, so rejected by his community, that he sleeps with corpses. His anguish and disgrace is visible to all. But as with the demons that may haunt us, some inherited from others, some of our own

making, some perhaps supernatural, the origins of these demons are not easily visible. We don't know what has brought on this man's suffering or exactly what it is that possesses him. And his community doesn't seem to care. He's just that crazy guy who walks the streets and raves at night in the tombs

But Jesus knows. And the demons know Jesus. And they are afraid

They are afraid because they recognize Jesus's authority even when the gentiles of Gerasenes don't. They recognize that Jesus has the power to cast them out, into an outer darkness the demons believed was thick and turgid and chaotic and watery. Water in particular was terrifying to demons in the ancient world. It was the substance in which demons were permanently destroyed.

So Jesus accepts their deal. *Leave the man....* he says.

*And, yes, I will give you permission to enter this herd of swine over here.* The demons comply. After all, they need a host. A person, an animal to hide in, in order to stay dry and invisible and to multiply. And that's when it becomes apparent that Jesus knew what he was doing all along. He wasn't making a deal with the devil. But sending the gentiles (and by extension us) a graphic message. All we need to do is sit back and watch. Because the swine, driven to distraction by the invisible demons within them, are also driven by a herd mentality. Possessed, they dash headlong to the edge of a cliff and cast themselves right over into the lake of Galilee ... where they are permanently destroyed.

Not by the fall but by the water.

And so we remember our baptism: living water that has the power even now to destroy our demons, to give us the courage to face our fears, to accept change, to resist the herd and to restore our true identity as children of the one God, inheritors of the promise and repairers of the breach.

The swine herders standing around are understandably upset, however. After all, their livelihood has just jumped off a cliff... a bear market, if ever there was one. But beneath their economic anxieties is something even more destructive: fear. Fear which spreads and festers faster than any virus. They run to tell people: people from the country, people from the towns, anyone they can find. Come and see what Jesus has done! He has

healed the lunatic! And when they arrive by the lake, they can see it with their own eyes. The man who was once the town lunatic is now sitting calmly at Jesus's feet, clothed and in his right mind. And what do they do? Instead of dropping to their knees in empathy and gratitude and awe, they run Jesus right out of town.

They are afraid. And most afraid of Jesus's power to *heal* because healing requires change. And perhaps they like their lives well enough as they are. Divided into the categories they already know and trust: where there are clearly good guys and the bad guys, the clean and the unclean, the crazies and the sane, the haves and the have nots. And also perhaps because they have grown attached to their own lesser demons. They are the shape they already are: as cozy as an old sweater. And the devil you know is better than some freedom you can't even imagine. And real change might hurt. And so they ask Jesus to leave them alone

Imagine. You are one of those people, the swineherds and the people they gathered, the people of Gerasene, from the town or from the country and suddenly by an act of miraculous imagination you are translocated some 2,000 years into the future and you are sitting with us here in church. Your mind wandering...the sermon is meandering, when suddenly, it hits you upside the head...like a past life or something... Suddenly you recognize it is you in this story...this old story being told about the time Jesus crossed the sea and visited your community; the time he was standing there right in the midst of you; in the flesh, brown skin, warm hands; the promise of healing in his eyes and, you cringe as you remember, instead of opening your heart to him, instead of opening up your life for a future bigger than your past, you were afraid, and with a gang of others you ran Jesus right out of town.

And what if that day were this day. This very June 19th 2022. Father's day The day when we give thanks for the legacy of our fathers and our father's fathers and their father's fathers *and* a day when we also remember a more difficult legacy: Juneteenth 1865, the day the emancipation proclamation was finally delivered to Galveston, Texas, proclaiming freedom for all enslaved Americans. The day when all Americans were to be free at last Americans. But God knows, working that out, for real, in practical terms, in power and in economic relations, in hearts hardened by a fear of loss, there is still ongoing work. But what would those same ancient Gerasenes, sitting here with us, have say to? I imagine them waving their arms at us from the back pews. *Don't be afraid!* they shout. *Don't make the same mistake we did! You won't be destroyed, only changed! You won't be destroyed, only freed! Don't be afraid! You were freed of your own demons in the waters of baptism. Remember your new life in Christ in which there is no longer slave or free, Jew or gentile, or even male **and** female. None of that is what matters. What matters is your true identity, as a beloved child of God. We are all now all children of the promise, empowered to spread good news to those in the town and in the country. Conquer your fear. Rise up! Stand tall!*

Will we listen or would we prefer to bicker and run Jesus out of town?

In closing, I would like us to remember our first reading from Isaiah: what if we imagined these words spoken not by God but by His representative in the world: our own church?

**I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that did not call on my name.**

What if we were ready and willing as a church to be sought out by those who did not ask, and to be found by those who did not seek us?

Willing to throw our doors open and proclaim Here I am Here I am  
to a world that did not call on God's name but was nonetheless hungry and fearful and divided and beset by demons. *Here I am, Here I am!* instead of *Keep to yourself; Do not come near us, We are too holy for you!*

That is why the stage.

That is why Body and Land

That is why the fair and the tag sale

The holy dogs for the car show

Dinner for St Vincents

Warming on main

Services on the lawn

The pilgrimage with other churches on Good Friday

The foot clinic

Our wonderful eclectic music

Here I am, world! Here we are!

What miracles might happen right here in this church if we were ready to risk change and become leaders for the world outside our doors.

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