

2C Pentecost, Proper 7

June 23, 2019

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Isaiah 65:1-9

Despite the many ways God's people fall short, God remains faithful.

Galatians 3:23-29

As many of you as were baptized in Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Luke 8:26-29

Jesus heals the Gerasene demoniac; people fear him and ask him to leave.

[Ger' a seens]

Ephesians 6:12 "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God."

Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross over to the other side of the lake." The lake was the Sea of Galilee, and that trip took them out of Jewish territory into the land of the Gerasenes. This was Gentile land; where people did not know God. And in that land Jesus met a man who was overtaken by demons. Imagine being one of the witnesses of this event. The people in that town obviously knew the man; for many years he had worn no clothes, lived in the cemetery, and sometimes had to be chained up and guarded; but he was able to break the chains and run away. Jesus knew that what was at work was evil spirits. And so he asked, "What is your name?" The answer should have put chills down the spine of every person who heard the reply; "Legion". A legion was the largest unit in the Roman army; about 6,000 soldiers. But that wasn't what made the people afraid.

In the first century, many cultures believed that the world was populated by demons, nymphs, centaurs, and angels who controlled nature and sometimes took possession of people or controlled their fate. And so people used amulets, magic, sacrifices, and complicated rituals to keep the spiritual powers happy.

In our day, we understand most calamities and disorders to come from the forces of nature or from mental or emotional illness. We hardly ever hear about exorcism of evil spirits like what Jesus did, even though there is guidance on this in our own BOS p174. (Refer to the Bishop!) (We sprinkle at house blessings; smudge on Easter Eve).

The man in this Gospel story had lost his own identity. He had lost his own name, his individuality. He was left with a Legion of conflicting forces within him. It was as though a Roman legion of soldiers was at war within him. But Jesus overpowered that Legion of evil with just a few words..

Jesus has compassion, and absolute power to overcome the greatest imaginable assembly of demons, and to bring wholeness, and restoration, and new life.

There is another observation to make from this story. The people responded with fear; not fear of this man, or of his condition, but fear of Jesus. They asked him to leave their land. They could not cope with the power that Jesus was displaying to

them. They could not feel comfortable in the Holy Space that Jesus was creating. They had gotten so used to the evil they saw, that they were comfortable with it. They were okay with the insane guy who lived in the cemetery. They were okay with chaining him up and standing guard over him when he was out of control.

Have we become so used to the homeless that we accept homelessness?
Have we become so used to people being hungry that we accept it as normal?
Have we become so used to failed relationships, or abuse, or school shootings, or evil, that we consider these things just part of life?

Our faith life as Christians hinges on you and me seeking out life in God's Holy Space; living in God's presence and learning to depend on Him more and more completely as we grow in our understanding of Him. We learn how to put on the full armor of God. Or as Paul wrote, to 'clothe ourselves with Christ', to live in Holy Space, and to settle for nothing less. The non-believers in the land of the Garesene had no idea how to accept that; but we understand, because Jesus showed us what that life is like.

And Jesus offers us his compassion, and his power to defeat the effects of the unknown, even the unfriendly spiritual forces that exist. Jesus has that compassion and power; and once we claim it and use it, we can trust in faith that God's purpose is at work from that point on.

We do not send Jesus away, but we welcome his amazing offer to live in the Holy Space only he can provide; for him to always guard us and empower us in the life we live in his Name.

Amen.