

Dear Friends, I do hope that you are well. Here is yesterday's sermon on one of my favorite personalities in the Holy Scriptures, the Gerasene Demoniac. The message was preached sans manuscript, and intended as a prelude to a more modern narrative: our stories today. The sermon made time for congregants to have an opportunity to share with someone else in their pew an experience of the holy. Folks had 90 seconds to share and 90 seconds to listen. The energy was electric and instantaneous. Everyone talked and everyone listened. You are warmly invited to do the same as well. Shalom, James

“Go Home, and Share What New Things God Has Done For You”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur (Disciples of Christ), Georgia

Season of Eastertide, Sunday, May 12, 2013

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Philippians 1: 3-6 Mark 5: 1-20

Philippians 1: 3-6

Paul's Prayer for the Philippians

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Mark 5: 1-20

Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac

They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who

had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Let us pray:

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Amen! (Philippians 1: 3-6)

Have you ever noticed that when you're find something that was lost

it's always in the last place you look?

One morning a number of years ago

my eldest brother, David, was home alone

and putting on his socks and shoes to run an errand

when the phone rang.

Now I have to add the caveat that the phone was attached to

the wall.

In those days – for anyone under the age of 20 –

one could not really multi-task or carry a phone around.

After the phone conversation ended

David went back to what he was doing except he couldn't

because his socks were missing.

He looked high and low.

He retraced his steps, checked the bureau, the phone stand,
even rooms he hadn't been in that morning.

Had both socks up and left and gone home to Jesus?

By chance as he was passing by a mirror he saw out of the corner of his eye

that two socks were resting on his right shoulder,

exactly where he had draped them

when he stood up to answer the phone.

Later on, when he could look back and laugh, David would say with a smile,

“What if someone had knocked on the door

and asked me, ‘What are you doing?’

Then I would have said, ‘I can't find my socks.

Will you please help me look?’”

Sometimes we think something is lost that is right there beside us,

and when we find it we celebrate.

Sometimes we are the ones who are lost;

and sometimes it is our beloved who are lost.

The Good News is that Jesus in His infinite mercy is always looking for us,

always looking for our beloved,

always looking forward to the celebration that follows,

to the joy of reconciliation and reunion and re-membering.

Annie Piper said, *“The [church’s focus] is not so much on lostness*

as it is on foundness.”

One of the best parts of foundness is getting to tell our stories.

We all have stories of encounters with the holy,

of being found, of being healed, of experiencing true hospitality,

of being accepted and loved, and of loving someone else.

In a few minutes you will be invited to share a brief story

of an encounter with the holy that you have had

recently.

We are going to pair up in twos and threes.

But not yet.

First, let's listen to a very special encounter

between two men in the land of the Gerasenes.

The late Clarence Jordan had a fascinating theory

about where Jesus got the idea for the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

One day Jesus met a man, not a fictional character in a parable,

but a real person who was lost and in hiding.

In both Mark 5: 1-20 and Luke 8:26-39, we learn that:

One day Jesus Christ was visiting at the country of the Gerasenes,

which is opposite Galilee.

As he stepped out on land from his boat,

there met him a man from the city who had demons.

Cowering before Jesus was a Jew who was watching swine,

the lowest and dirtiest job a Jew could have.

The man he met was stark raving mad, and Jesus healed him,

casting the demons into the swine, who then rushed
down the steep bank

into the lake and were drowned.

The herdsmen watching all this happen then fled,

and returned later with many townspeople.

To their surprise they found the Geresene demoniac sitting
with Jesus,

calm, clothed, and in his right mind.

He had come to himself.

He had come to Jesus.

Thanks be to God, Jesus helped him come to his senses.

As Jesus started to go back to Galilee,

the man tried to get in the boat with him.

But Jesus told him,

*“Return to your home, and declare how much God
has done for you.”*

*“Go home, and share what new things God has done
for you!”*

“And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city

how much Jesus had done for him.” --Luke 8:26-39

Both the Gerasene Demoniac and Jesus Christ had an

experience of the holy.

The encounter moved Jesus.

Consider what happened soon afterward.

Now, imagine Jesus sitting in the boat on the return journey,

thinking about this Jew he had just helped,

a man of faith yet dead to the world, lost in his
soul,

living without healthy relationships,

and slowly losing his mind among
the swine.

“But when he comes to himself...”

As Jesus tells the story he uses language that literally means
“to repent.”

But when he comes to himself -- when he repents of his
actions --

when he turns away from sin and separation,

when he turns toward Jesus coming to him on
the shore,

he finds that God loves him, knows him,
cares for him.

He is healed and then goes home,

rejoicing along the way, hoping to reconcile with his family.

As Jesus sits on the gently rocking boat sailing back to Galilee,

he thinks about the man's family at home, how they might react,

how they might feel, how they might think.

Jesus wonders if there is a father looking down the road each morning and night,

hoping to catch a glimpse of a returning wayward child.

Jesus considers whether there is a sibling at home,

one who is diligently working in the fields,

upset at having to do twice as much work

and go to twice as many meetings and functions

all because he was left behind by his prodigal brother.

What if, as he sails back to Galilee,

Jesus allows a true story to take the shape of a parable.

A parable about the joy of a father,

the hope of a parent,

the grace of a forgiving Creator
who looks down the road each day,
filled with anticipation and worry,
hope and concern.

Both Jesus Christ and the Gerasene Demoniac had an experience of the holy.

The encounter moved the man who once was lost and then found.

Consider what happened soon afterward.

The end of the story is really a new beginning.

*“...He went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city
how much Jesus had done for him.” --Luke 8:26-39*

The end of the story is really a new beginning.

Everyone here has had at least one experience of the holy in the past 10 days.

In a minute I am going to invite you to share your story
with a neighbor in the pew.

Take a couple minutes to tell your tale,
and then I'll call out “switch”,

which is your cue to listen to your neighbor's
story

of an experience of the holy.

This might help to put our stories in context:

“The spiritual life is not so much progress as it is process.

It is not a continuous climb upward

as much as it is a continuous climb.

It is not the victories that matter

so much as the going on after the defeats.

The longer the erratic dance of faith goes on,

the less you care about what God is doing

and the more you want to know about God.”

(Mike Yaconelli in “The Door”)

(Afterward)

Did you feel the energy spike?

Did you notice the hub-bub, the roar, the wall of sound

of a room filled with the sound of holy stories being shared?

The end of our stories are really new beginnings!

Now go home, and share what good and new things God has done for you!

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

EXTRA MATERIAL:

John Keats said: “There is a budding morrow in midnight.”

No one can live your life for you; no one can take your place on this earth. Abraham Lincoln was awakened in the middle of the night by a government bureaucrat who informed President Lincoln that a high ranking official had just passed away. “Can I take his place?” the bureaucrat blurted out. Lincoln replied, “If it’s all right with the undertaker, it’s all right with me.”

Timothy Keel has a child who is willing to forget lost toys
in exchange for bright, shiny new ones.

Keel writes: “The parable of the prodigal son
offers us a different perspective on “lostness” though.
While small [children] may eventually forget lost toys,
Jesus tells us that God has no such freedom.
To the eternal God of the universe,
“lost” doesn’t mean the inability to locate the object of
desire.
Nothing is lost to God on a physical level:
God is present in all places in all times.
When something is lost to God,
it means that it is cut off from the relationship
God so desires to have with it.
And here is the rub -- it is not merely misplaced, it is hiding.”

The townspeople were angry, and they were afraid.
They were angry that the pigs had drowned.
They were more concerned about lost pigs than a saved soul!
Granted, the pigs were their livelihood.
However, in their presence was both the Son of God and a
renewed human life,
a neighbor who was broken and isolated, disruptive
and disoriented,

and suddenly he could sit calmly and in his
right mind.

Have you ever noticed that when folks prioritize profit over
people

then it's not a big leap before one gets angry

at the tendency for the will of God to lean more
toward

curing the human condition and
reconciling relationships?

When someone decides that the love of money

matters more than loving relationships,

then nothing is more maddening

than the nature and nurture of God

to seek and save and send out
into the world

the lost and the last and
the least among us.

The townspeople were angry, and they were afraid.

They feared the power God has to heal and help.

And what have you seen people do when they are angry or
afraid?

Sometimes an angry or fearful soul wants someone to
change, but rarely is it him or herself.

For the townspeople, Jesus and the Gerasene Demoniac
became their target.

They insisted that Jesus leave, and the newly healed man as well.

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"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." --Annie Dillard