

**Weekend of Sunday, June 23, 2019**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 12/Proper 7/Year C**  
**Primary Text: Luke 8:26-39**  
**Sermon Title: “Freed from the Chains that Bind Us”**

**Theme**

*Jesus’ mission includes foreigners, and his authority extends to the casting out of demons. Some who witness Jesus’ work are seized with confusion and fear, but the man who was healed is commissioned to give testimony of God’s mercy and power.*

**Text**

<sup>26</sup>Then [Jesus and his disciples] arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup>As 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. <sup>28</sup>When 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”—<sup>29</sup>for 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.) <sup>30</sup>Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. <sup>31</sup>They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

<sup>32</sup>Now 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. <sup>33</sup>Then 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.

<sup>34</sup>When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. <sup>35</sup>Then 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. <sup>36</sup>Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. <sup>37</sup>Then 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. <sup>38</sup>The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup>“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.

## Sermon

The three readings prescribed for today take us on a theological journey. The First Reading from Isaiah is God's angry response to the faithlessness of the Israelites. In that passage God enumerates many of their sins such as,

- They don't seek the LORD.
- They follow their own way instead.
- They make sacrifices to false gods.
- They sit in tombs.
- They eat pork (make special note of these last two issues).

All these are forbidden according to the ancient Law and yet they, the Israelites, God's chosen and redeemed people, have sought after other false gods over the God of their salvation.

God's response was to let them suffer the consequences of their own actions. 'You want to worship other gods? Fine, I hope they rescue you when you are over-run by your enemies.'

And lest we think God was lacking in grace and willing to break the covenant God made with the Israelites through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses, God will not let his people be wiped out completely. God will save a remnant of faithful people from which he will restore the nation. That is little consolation for the many who decided to turn their backs on God, but it was their choice.

In the Second Reading from Galatians, the apostle Paul wrote that before faith in Jesus Christ, people had no choice but to suffer the consequences of the Law, again that is the Law of Moses that all Jews are held too.

**<sup>25</sup>But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian,  
<sup>26</sup>for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.**

I probably don't need to explain that at all except to say that faith in Christ is a game-changer for both Jews and Gentiles, for as Paul wrote,

<sup>28b</sup>*all* are one in Christ Jesus! <sup>29</sup>And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

So you see that little thing we say at the beginning of each service is true. "You belong here. We belong together."

Take a closer look at that passage. What is the first word? All? Maybe we should say, "All belong here. All belong together."

So I have Good News! The promise of God, salvation and eternal life, is available to *all* who believe it in faith and belong to Christ!

Now let's move on to the Gospel Reading because it contains a fantastic story of redemption and release.

You heard it yourself, there was a man from the nearby town of Gergesa, who suffered from the mental illness of dissociative identity disorder (DID), previously known as multiple personality disorder. In fact he had so many personalities inhabiting his mind that he had taken the name, Legion, a name indicating how many personalities he had cluttering his head.

Like all mental illness, it was not his fault. But in that day without much scientific understanding, the best he and the community could do was disassociate; he lived out of town in the town's cemetery, far enough away from the townsfolk. The townsfolk had apparently tried shackles and chains but Legion managed to break free of them, but not of his illness – that was what really bound him.

Now I told you to remember two issues from the First Reading. One was the prohibition against spending too much time in cemeteries, or in tombs, as was written in that reading. That prohibition had to do with the health problems associated with decaying flesh and the vermin and insects that coexist and let's face it, live off of decaying flesh. But that same prohibition allowed Legion a safe place to live out his troubled life without affecting others.

As the story goes, when Jesus and company had traversed the Sea of Galilee, he was met by this man Legion, who was naked – which was then and also remains forbidden today in middle-eastern culture. Jesus never said a word to Legion, but upon encountering Jesus, Legion fell down in front of Jesus and the voices that

inhabited him cried out, calling him by name, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.”

Jesus asked him his name, and you might ask why. There is power in knowing a name. I've preached a sermon on just this dialogue between Jesus and Legion, but this is not the day for that. Suffice it to say that in this moment that Legion knew Jesus' name, and though I'm pretty sure Jesus knew Legion's name, in telling Jesus his name was Legion, he is giving Jesus power over him. You see, Legion didn't want to be mentally ill and cause havoc in Gergesa. It wasn't his fault. He wanted freed from that which bound him.

So the demons, as the story goes, knew Jesus had the power to free Legion and so they begged him to be sent into a herd of swine, and when he did that, the swine apparently went crazy, ran down into the sea and drowned.

Legion was freed of the chains that bound him. He was restored to full health, and realizing he was naked, they gave him some clothes to put on. All was well. For a moment.

Gergesa is on the southeast side of the lake and inhabited by Gentiles. How do I know that? Among the townsfolk were the swineherders, and swine were considered unclean by the Jews. That was the second point I asked you to remember. Well, somehow the townsfolk heard about what had happened, both the healing of Legion and the drowning of the herd of swine and they came out to see for themselves.

And here in a strange result, having seen the results of an encounter with Jesus, both the healing of Legion and the death of the hogs, "they were seized with great fear" and asked Jesus to leave.

Legion was so thankful to Jesus that he asked to go with him, but Jesus knew that the man formerly known as Legion had more kingdom value in staying behind telling all the Gentiles about his friend and Lord Jesus.

I've entitled this sermon, “*Freed from the Chains that Bind Us*” because I believe with all my heart that Jesus was and remains in the business of freeing people from chains that bind us.

Legion had mental illness, it was not his fault. Some people just get mental illness. There are people who are born with all kinds of mental deficiencies, it's not their fault. God revealed in Jesus Christ can free them from the chains that bind them.

There are people who born with different colors of skin and people from all parts of the globe. It's not their fault. There are people who are prejudiced and demonstrate a lack of compassion for others. Sometimes they were born into families who nurtured bigotry, sometimes they had a bad experience, sometimes they are just ignorant. God revealed in Jesus Christ can free them from the chains that bind them.

There are people who are trapped in a seemingly hopeless cycle of poverty. God revealed in Jesus Christ can free them from the chains that bind them.

There are people who are trapped in a seemingly hopeless cycle of addiction. God revealed in Jesus Christ can free them from the chains that bind them.

Personally, I am trapped in a seemingly hopeless cycle of addiction to sin and cannot free myself. You are too if you admit it. But thank God, God revealed in Jesus Christ can free me and you from the chains that bind us.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

This week I would like to challenge to take a look at yourself, and your family, and your possessions and your life. First give thanks to God, because most of us are so very blessed.

Second, I want to reflect on your own life, and see where you may be harboring sin. I know, sounds like Ash Wednesday, but Martin Luther said we should reflect daily on our complicity to sin, and then confess and return our orientation toward God.

Third, I would like you to pray that God free you from those areas that bind your life, those chains that you feel holding you back from being Christian. Oh sure, if what I've said offends you, there is another way, the Israelites chose it. But you bear the name Christian – which literally means little Christ. Are you living up to that name?

And you know the name of your bondage breaker, your chain breaker. It is Jesus Christ. And he knows your name too. He calls you

- a descendant from Jacob;
- an inheritor of Judah;
- Abraham's offspring;
- a child of God;
- one in Christ;
- an inheritor of the Kingdom;
- he knows your name, and names you his own.

You belong here. We belong together.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, protect us from ourselves. Free us from that which binds us, so that in our freedom, we might assist others to know the freedom that only comes through discipleship in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen