

1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a

Psalms 42 and 43

Galatians 3: 23-29

Luke 8:26-39 (46-55)

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Proper 7 Year C

6/22/25 Juneteenth

Legions and other Demons

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen

Steeped in drama and action, our readings this morning are hard to top—or ignore. Prophets are slaughtered, a fierce wind splits mountains, earthquakes erupt, fires are raging. Angels appear in dreams and nourishing cakes baked on hot stones are there in the morning for nourishment. To top it off, Elijah hears God speak to him in a mountain cave.

The psalms radiate our trust in and longing for God especially when he's remote. Galatians celebrates our unity in Christ and glory in diversity—no longer Jew or Greek, male or female, we are all one when clothed in Christ in baptism. Paul's letter to the Galatians seems like a perfect and satisfying ending for a Sunday sermon. But no such luck.

Because when we slam into Luke's gospel, buckle your seat belts. We're in for one wild ride when Jesus sails from Galilee to Gerasene and gets out of the boat. A naked man possessed by demons and in the throes of madness comes running and screaming towards him on the shore.

And Jesus, being Jesus, upends everything.

The cut-to-the-chase quality of the story is striking. The man somehow recognizes Jesus immediately. We don't know why or how. But we do know that Jesus calls the demons out of him. The man's sudden and miraculous healing can't be real. He begs Jesus not to torment him anymore.

Jesus flips the script by asking the man his name. "Legion." Hardly a sturdy biblical name like Joshua, Ezra, or Simon-- but a name that defines him not by his soul, but the forces that are tearing him apart. Our name is where we begin. It can be startling to ask someone their name. If you've never asked someone who is asking you for money or food, try it and feel the shift that happens as somehow, the distance between you narrows.

But what is even more startling in Gerasene, is that the demons *also* recognize Jesus and plead not to be sent back into the abyss and into a herd of swine instead. You know what happens next – the pigs go over the cliff, into the sea, and drown—a sermon for another time.

It's tempting to call a halt right there and turn the page on this wild and reckless ride. But in doing so, we shortchange ourselves and miss the insight and wisdom this bizarre story has to teach.

“The truth is, what ails us as human beings is Legion,” writes author Debie Thomas:

The evil that haunts us has many faces, many names. We are all — every one of us — vulnerable to forces that seek to take us over, to bind our mouths, to take away our true names, and to separate us from God and from each other.... If we expand the definition of “possession” to include everything that conspires to keep us dead when God wants us alive, then the story of the Gerasene demoniac is not an ancient oddity. It is the air we breathe.¹

And the air we are breathing as a nation today is saturated with hate, cruelty, violence, war, and oppression. The announcement a few days ago that a hotline specifically for the LGBTQ+ community will be shut down defies words and our common humanity. This week our present collided with Juneteenth, our national holiday marking the official end of slavery-- America's original sin.

But we all know, as Representative Hakeem Jeffries, the first Black leader of either party in Congress said in honoring Juneteenth, “that struggle roars on.”

Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Juneteenth honors the day in 1865 Major General Gordon Granger ordered the final enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in Galveston, Texas.

Two thousand years ago in Gerasene. Jesus called out the evil that possessed and enslaved a man named Legion, But the story didn't end there although Legion surely wished it did.

When the townspeople heard that Legion had been healed, they came to see for themselves and found him “clothed and in his right mind.” But the reference isn't only to his outer garments but to his oneness with Christ—exactly what Paul refers to in Galatians—when he said that those who have been baptized are now “clothed in Christ.” The townspeople, overcome with fear, and ordered Jesus to leave.

Legion wanted to get back in the boat with Jesus and his disciples and sail away from the community that had chained and enslaved him. But no such luck.

¹ Thomas, Debie, “Journey with Jesus,” a Weekly Webzine for the Whole World, 6.16.19

While Jesus did make him a disciple, he *commanded* Legion to go back into his hometown and continue to testify to his miraculous healing, flipping the script once again.

He did this because he knew that what has been emancipated must be *proclaimed*.

And we must continue to find the power to proclaim it together.

Activist, author, and African American scholar, the late Dr. Barbara Holmes explains:

When you feel alone look at those who are with you in the struggle, and those who have gone before. No matter the circumstances, it was community that empowered the justice movements in this country and in others. It was a momentum of like minds focused and trusting in God that gave activists the energy to face their fears.²

Last Saturday, 5 million Americans protested in the No Kings rallies nationwide, the largest mass protest in our nation's history.

One of them was our very own Dorothy Stevens who joined her first march *ever* last Saturday at 88. 88!

That's what being clothed in Christ means. That's what gives me strength and that's what proves what can happen when we as a community of "like minds focused and trusting in God" can do—stand up and stand together, clothed in Christ and proclaim the truth we know in the liberating, lifegiving power of his love, non-violence and peace.

AMEN

² Holmes, Barbara, "Embodied by Joy," Center for Action and Contemplation's Living School, Essentials of Engaged Conversations, August, 2024