

Sermon and Prayers for Sunday, June 19, 2022  
Second Sunday after Pentecost/Juneteenth  
Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA  
Bishop William O. Gafkjen

### **Prayer of the Day**

O Lord God, we bring before you the cries of a sorrowing world. In your mercy set us free from the chains that bind us, and defend us from everything that is evil, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

### **Galatians 3:23-29**

<sup>23</sup>Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup>Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. <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. <sup>27</sup>As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you 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.

### **Luke 8:26-39**

<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.

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In addition to being the Second Sunday after Pentecost, today is the commemoration of Juneteenth. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865 – two and a half years after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation – enslaved persons in Texas learned that they were free. That Proclamation changed the legal status of more than 3.5 million enslaved African Americans from enslaved to free. This big step in in denouncing and dismantling the system of enslavement was a huge step that is worth celebrating. As one commentator puts it, before the Emancipation Proclamation, “All lives” had not mattered for a long time because Black lives were considered outside the circle of ‘all’” people who were created equal.<sup>i</sup>

While this great day is important to lift up and celebrate, the work of freedom and equality for all is far from done. As the hymnwriter put it prayerfully,

*Still your children wander homeless; still the hungry cry for bread;  
Still the captives long for freedom; still in grief we mourn our dead.*<sup>ii</sup>

Maybe that day long ago when Jesus crossed a raging sea to enter the country of the Gerasenes – which Luke is careful to point out is “opposite” Galilee where Jesus usually hung out – was something of a Juneteenth for the man who had demons and met Jesus as he landed on this shore that was so opposite and far away from Galilee – culturally, religiously, even racially. There, this unnamed and tormented man heard and experienced the almost unbelievable good news that Jesus had come to set him free.

Is it any wonder that the man then went away from this encounter with Jesus proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him?

Like the Emancipation Proclamation that finally reached enslaved people in Texas so long ago, that Gerasene man’s proclamation carries through the centuries to reach his descendants today, people who await release from bondage, people who desire and deserve to be dressed with dignity rather than the naked shame imposed by others, people who want nothing more than to stop living in the tombs and to abide finally and fully in the house of the living.

The proclamation is that Jesus will cross the widest sea and the deepest chasm to reach unfamiliar and uncomfortable places and people who have been dismissed, enslaved, and shamed by others, Jesus will walk in solidarity with them and set them free. Jesus will go all the way to the cross, descend into the bowels of hell, and live in the tombs until God breaks the chains and frees him from death-dealing bondage. Jesus, crucified and risen, walks among the living – with the wounds of the world still in his hands, his side, his feet – to confront and overcome the powers that bind and offer the forgiveness and freedom of new, abundant, and lasting life for all who live among the tombs, each in their own country of the Gerasenes.

This is who Jesus is.

And this is who we are.

In baptism we have gone deep into the death and resurrection of Jesus. By water and Word we have been forgiven and set free, raised from living in tombs to walk the world to follow Jesus in offering the freedom of new, abundant, and lasting life for **all** people, especially those whom we or others do not usually include in “all.”

Marked with the cross of Christ, sealed forever by his Spirit, we are sent to come alongside those who are bound by the chains of powers and principalities and living among the tombs to set them free in the power of the Spirit.

In fact, the witness of scripture suggests that to not do so may reflect our own continued bondage to death-dealing powers and principalities that demean, diminish, and dismiss others simply because “they” are not “us”, or are not like us in skin color, culture, identity, theology, political persuasion, or any of the other reasons we make up to “other” others and chain them to a life living among the tombs.

Do you remember what the first of Martin Luther’s famously posted 95 Theses is?

It’s this: “When our Lord Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he meant that the whole of Christian life is repentance.”

This story of Jesus’ journey may well be a call for some of us to live into the life of repentance that rises from our baptism...Jesus landing on the Gerasene shore is a call for those who follow him to examine, confess, turn away from, and allow God to break the chains that keep us from reaching out to those who are different from us, or imprison us in demanding conformity to our way of thinking, being, acting and thereby impose binding chains on others, relegating them to live among the tombs, or to languish along the margins of the new, abundant, and lasting life so hard won by Jesus.

For some in the story, the chain-breaking power of Jesus induced fear and the desire for Jesus to leave. The same may be true for some of us; it certainly is far too often for me. This sort of power is disruptive. It challenges our assumptions. It displaces us from the center.

But when this power works on and through us, it is also freeing and life-giving. We are given new, deeper, broader ways to see and experience the world. We are offered the gifts of those we have previously rejected or ignored or chained to tomb-town. We hear from those who have been set free how much God has done for them and the eyes of our hearts can be opened to see how much God has also done for us.

Through examination, confession, and repentance and in the grace of forgiveness and the chain-rending power of resurrection, we are set free, as the apostle Paul might put it, from the law’s death-dealing disciplinarian to be clothed with the risen Christ and to live into the beautiful, life-giving depth and diversity of a community in which there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for **all** are one in Christ...**all** are heirs to the promise of new, abundant, and lasting life...and all welcome each other and each person and community’s gifts with freedom and joy.

And the proclamation of what God has done will reach the ends of the earth and echo through time, to the glory of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen

## Prayers of Intercession<sup>iii</sup>

United in Christ and guided by the Spirit, we pray for the church, the creation, and all in need.

*A brief silence.*

Holy God, you hear the cries of those who seek you. Equip your church with evangelists who reveal the continuous call of your outstretched hands and your promises of a home in you. God of grace,  
**hear our prayer.**

You hear the cries of the earth. Restore places where land, air, and waterways have been harmed. Guide us to develop and implement sources of energy and food production that do not destroy the earth. God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

You hear the cries of those who are marginalized or cast out. On this Juneteenth observance, guide us continually toward the end of oppression in all its forms, especially white supremacy. Bring true freedom and human flourishing to all your beloved children. God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

You hear the cries of those who suffer. Come to the aid of all who are homeless, naked, hungry, and sick especially those we name now, silently and aloud. (Pause) Bring peace to any experiencing mental illness, that they can clearly recognize your loving presence. God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

You hear the cries of those who celebrate and those who grieve on this Father's Day. Nurture mutual love and tender care in all relationships. Comfort those for whom this day brings sadness or longing. God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for the faithful departed whose lives proclaimed all you had done for them, especially those we pause to remember now. At the last, unite us with them as we make our home in you. God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

God of every time and place, in Jesus' name and filled with your Holy Spirit, we entrust these spoken prayers and those in our hearts into your holy keeping.

**Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> Tim Wise: <https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2021/06/18/juneteenth-white-people>

<sup>ii</sup> Albert F. Bayly in Evangelical Lutheran Worship Hymn 712, "Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service"

<sup>iii</sup> Prayers adapted from Sundays and Seasons (<https://www.sundaysandseasons.com>)