"Let these who seek
        the Lord give praise!" AMEN!

Sometimes we encounter something in the Bible
        that grabs our attention in such a way
                that we wonder how we could have
                        ever missed it?

It could be a word or a phrase,
        usually it's a rather small thing.

Yet, once noticed you realize the small thing
        brought about a significant impact.

And, if that small thing never happened,
        then the significant impact might
                not have occurred.

The one I'm talking about this
        morning is in verse 27 of Luke's gospel.

"He stepped out."

The "he" refers to Jesus, of course.

"Jesus stepped out," are three simple
        words but they carry a significant impact.

This simple act of stepping off the boat
    brought about miraculous events.

On the boat, there were miraculous events, too.

Jesus had just calmed the storm.

Even the wind and waves obeyed Jesus,
    much to the dismay of his followers.

But, for Jesus, it was not enough
    to only save his friends.

Today, we find him, for the first
    time in Luke's gospel,
        stepping out into Gentile territory
            to see if he might save others. (Pause)

This miraculous healing event, in a foreign land,
    is not a parable but it occurred to me that
        we might identify ourselves with
            the different participants of the story.

For instance, I've often considered myself
    to be the man in need of healing.

Nothing wrong with that but
    there are others we might identify with, too.

How about the disciples?

"Where are they?" you ask.
    Good question!

The Bible said they all arrived to
        the foreign territory but only Jesus stepped out
            of the boat.

The disciples dissolve out of the story.

Do we identify with them?
        A lot of us do.

Sitting on our hands to not
        get involved or speak up.

Oh, our love for Jesus is real, but
        I'll let him take care of this one, we say,
            while I stay safe and sound in the boat.

I am in need of healing AND
        I may be the one afraid to get out of the boat, too.
(Pause)

What about the pigs?

Now, I'm not meaning to be insensitive
        nor will we call anyone a pig! :-)

But shouldn't we give a moment of silence
        to the poor little porkers that
                ran off the cliff to their demise?

They are the punished life forms of the gospel.

The pigs were the vessels to which
        the demon "Legion" are sent.

A message to remind us how much
        (and to what extent) the man
                was tormented by these demons.

He'd lived with them for years but
        when they enter the pigs, the poor animals
                cannot bear it a single minute and rush
                        to their death as soon as they can.

To the Jewish population there would
        not be any love loss for the death of the swine,
        since they were forbidden (unclean)
                animals anyway.

But notice, when they die, suddenly
        there's interest from the townspeople. Right?

Disrupt someone's way of making money and
        you're sure to get the attention from the crowd.

So, maybe we are the angry folks from town? (Pause)

You know what today is, right?
    June 19th, also known as Juneteenth.

The day that is now a federal holiday to celebrate
        the emancipation of enslaved Africans Americans.

But June 19th, wasn't when
        the Emancipation Proclamation was signed.

This date, in 1865, it was announced
        to slaves in Texas that they were free.

Even though the Emancipation Proclamation
        was issued on January 1, 1863, slavery
                continued until Union troops could
                        advance into the remote places of
                                America and make the law known.

Angry folks came out when
        their cash crop (human beings, slave labor)
were freed and liberated.

They didn't come out to celebrate.

They came out angry and afraid.

They came out to build systems of
    disenfranchisement, voting restrictions,
        segregation laws, and (some) even to join
            the KKK and make free life as difficult
                as possible to the people now freed.

Such policies continue unto this day.

When we elevate the flag to the level of the cross;
    when we push the erasing of history in order
        to hide our past sins;

when we silently allow books to be banned
    because a main character is gay or trans;

when we accept a white, European Jesus
    as normal because the savior of the world
        must look like me;

When we buy into replacement conspiracy theories.

When we don't step out, we allow for their
    anger and fear to shape society and our church.

Many in our society are the angry townspeople
    that went out to see what Jesus had done
        and became afraid when they saw
            the former demoniac now in
                his right mind, fully clothed,

and sitting at the feet of Jesus...

They couldn't bear to see the man they had
    put in chains and segregated from society
        now restored and a disciple of the Lord's. (Pause)

As polls show how people are leaving
    the Biblical Jesus in exchange for
        a Colonized Christianity,
            we find a distorted view of Jesus.

But, Jesus never taught that the
    sole purpose of his way
        was all about conversion.

For the Biblical Jesus, it was always
    about transformation by the Spirit,
        we find Jesus not interested
            in mere conversion but
                in a God to human convergence;
a transformation from bondage to freedom,
    from disease to wellness,
        from segregated to integrated.

In the words of Rev William Barber, II,
    "If we believe in a resurrected Jesus,
        then standing with the least of these
            is automatic."

Who are we in the gospel lesson? (Pause)

One thing's for sure... we are not Jesus! :-)

Do we stay on the boat out of fear?

Do we require healing?

Are we tied up in our possessions in such
        the way that we allow slave labor to exist
                or segregation to remain unchallenged?

Are we the townspeople who send Jesus away
        out of fear for the liberation he provides
                to the least?

Honesty reveals that most of us
        would say "yes" to all or most of
                those questions.

The good news is, it is not too late
        to be the one who recognizes Jesus,
                become healed, and then proclaim all
                        that he has done.

There's still time to not live among the dead
        and there's still time to see how we
                chain ourselves to the worst things.

For the gospel has something to say to us and
    we must not be afraid to breathe it; speak it; live it.

When we find ourselves in the worst places...
    God shows up.

And we cannot help but be transformed.

What do you say?

Let's step out of the boat with Jesus.

AMEN!