

“O Lord, do not be far away!
Come quickly to our aid and rescue.” AMEN!

Today, when we look around at
the varieties of Christianity in the world
we might wonder if there’s
anything we can agree on.

We argue about baptism and Holy Communion,
hymns, and ministries,
you name it, we’ll argue.

How ought money be spent and how much
ought to be saved?

Large cathedrals glorify God,
but all that money spent
could have gone to
aid a hungry nation.

So many things we argue about
have truths on both sides, yet
we try to fit everything into
“Good” or “Bad” categories,
so we fight and fight.

It makes me wonder if we
can we agree on anything?

Well, if there's one thing we can all agree on
it's that Jesus performed miracles
through the power of deliverance
and with the presence of healing.

(Pause)

Time and time again,
whether Jesus encountered someone
who was diseased or disabled,
possessed or oppressed,

hungry or even full, he came to those
who were faced with impossibilities and
showed that their present situation
was not the end of their story.

In an event like the one we
read about in Luke today,
we find so many things to talk about,
marvel over, and even question.

The possessed man with a "Legion" of demons;
the thousands of pigs sentenced to die,
the business people who lost
their livelihoods when the pigs

ran into the sea, and then
the townspeople who were so afraid of Jesus
that they begged Jesus to leave them.

Where do we go to find the message God
has for us in the account?

If we're not careful we can begin
to focus on wrong things. (Pause)

So, let's put ourselves into the shoes of
the disciples with Jesus that day.

They didn't simply appear in
the country of the Garazenes.

Right before this reading, they were in a boat
with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee.

That was when the storm whipped up
while Jesus slept.

The disciples were terrified over the danger
and woke Jesus up to tell him they were
all about to die.

Jesus, the Bible tells us, woke up and

rebuked the wind and the raging waves
and asked the disciples
where was their faith?

So, if we are in the shoes of the disciples
then we've just come off a life threatening
boat ride and now on foreign soil

and because of the fears - their faith was
on shaky ground.

In other words, out of one frying pan and
into another frying pan and not feeling
very confident in either one. (Pause)

Think of a time when you might have
been on foreign soil.

What did it feel like?

Did you speak the language?

Did you have to rely on a guide?

When I took went on a mission trip
to Guyana before going to seminary,
I remember feeling like a fish out of water.

I was totally reliant on the guide.

I had to trust them to know what taxi to take.

I had to trust the van driver to navigate
the roads and traverse over
the Demerara River and trust that
I had a place to lay my head at night.

When we went into Georgetown,
I was hesitant when street merchants
approached me.

I wanted to buy their craftwork but
didn't want to be
taken advantage of (or worse)

because it was obvious was an American.

Nothing negative happened to any of us.

And I look forward to one day returning to Guyana,
but going into new territories is scary when
we are required to trust other people
to keep us safe.

Under the circumstances we pray
for direction and protection, and

that leads us to address our own biases.

Just think of what it was like for the disciples
to be approached by
this unclothed (unclean) man
with super strength and
unpredictable behaviors.

What would you have done when confronted
with a person who appeared
to be unstable and unstoppable?

I wonder if the disciples thought
he'd overpower Jesus
they'd lose more than that or guide.

It might have surprised them that
Jesus did what he did, but
it shouldn't surprise us.

In the context of the church,
in our worshipping community, and
amid people committed to wholeness
and balance,

the powerful and peaceable voice of Jesus
calls out those who oppress, control,
and/or otherwise inflict revenge.

He names the demons that torment the world
and orders them to be destroyed. (Pause)

Jesus healed the man by giving permission
to the legion of demons to enter
the herd of pigs.

To us it's a lot of bacon.

To animal lovers it's a tragedy.

Pigs are incredible animals.

Yet, there's symbolism here.

The demons named themselves "Legion,"
a Roman word for about 5,000 soldiers.

Rome was inflicting force upon
the region of Garasene
as brutally as they were Israel.

They were seen as soldiers who
were possessed by evil.

Who wouldn't want such people exterminated?

This account is more than that, though.

It's about Jesus ability to heal people and
cure evil nations that wield authority
with oppression and indiscriminate power.

We can be confident in that belief.

Just as Jesus ventured into foreign territories,
so can we do things
that make us uncomfortable and
lead us to trust in others.

As we put ourselves into the shoes now of
the people from the surrounding
country of the Garasenes,

we might wonder about the ways
we push Jesus away, too. (Pause)

The townspeople were clearly upset.

Was it over the lost pigs or the waters
now polluted with carcasses?

Maybe, but notice the author
doesn't point any of that out.

Their reaction to Jesus occurred when they saw
the once demented and deranged person

now calm, clothed, and in their right mind
sitting at the feet of Jesus.

We might ask ourselves, in what ways
did this person's insanity provide
something useful to the people?

Were they comfortable in putting their fears,
hatred, and prejudices upon him in order
to feel better about themselves?

Was he their convenient scapegoat? (Pause)

We don't need to go far to
think of the town idiot,
the scorned adulterer, the drug addict,
the odd-ball whom we find hard to be around.

The people whom Jesus might
have gotten to without us
understanding why or how.

The next thing we know is it's our turn to hear
what they have to tell and teach. (Pause)

The outcome of the story is a
proclamation of new life that comes
when a person is touched by Jesus.

This once outcasted and dangerous man
becomes a beacon of hope to
the community that outcasted him.

If they listen, then even their present
situation is not the end of the story.

Just as our present situation is not the end of ours.

AMEN.