

Sermon – 2nd Sunday After Pentecost
Luke 8:26-39
June 23, 2019
“One More Time ... For Effect”

Alvin Rogness, former President of Luther Seminary, once wrote; *“You doubt what you most want to believe, and no one doubts what can be easily observed, but only what is longed for.”* Hebrews 11:1 says *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen.”* Romans 8:24-25 say *“who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”* Pastor Rogness was right – whatever happens to be in our lap or in our face wagging it’s finger at as saying *“you’ll never get through this”* strains our patience and our faith...*“you doubt what you most want to believe....and no one doubts what can be easily observed, but only what is longed for”*.

There was a man so tormented no one, least of all himself, ever thought he’d be well again. Normal was grotesque isolation and fear – even self- harm. Then he met Jesus Christ. The lesson we have today from Luke is easy for us to dismiss as remote from our circumstances. We don’t give much credence to demons these days - problems we encounter are diagnosable or researchable so we manage on our own, or with a little advice, or the right combination of pills.

Author Maurice Fetty a book entitled *“The Divine Advocacy”*, wrote; *“In polite society we have not wanted to talk much of demons and the demonic. In our liberal, educated culture, we have believed that sin was due mostly to ignorance and that evil could be eradicated by education. In our psychologically enlightened times, we have avoided the more ancient religious and mythological language of devils and evil. We have become explicitly suspicious of religious healers and exorcists, while (with good reason) implicitly trustful of psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors and therapy groups. But we have been doubtful of prayer, meditation and conversion, yet we have been trustful of whatever tranquilizers we can get our hands on.”*

I would add many people opt for an even worse approach... adaptation. We learn to limp with our troubles, our sins while maintaining some memory of what it was like before we limped. We doubt what we most want to believe - that there is something called forgiveness, and from it hope, and that forgiveness is nothing other than the most complete, lasting form of healing we can experience. What we most want to believe...yet most of the time doubt, is that God does forgive us for Christ’s sake and that we in turn, can forgive one another for Christ’s sake.

In one sense, this lesson today from Luke has little to do with us. The man in our lesson is demon possessed - we’d say neurotic if not insane. I make no attempt to equate his stunningly sad condition to what we understand today as mental illness, or suggest this man’s only problem was merely some un-confessed sin. This man was infested with the power of the evil one, and only the

power of the Holy One could free him. To demonstrate that Jesus was the Holy One of God is the sole function of this lesson. That the goodness of God ventured from Galilee to *"the opposite shore"* of the Garasene country, that the holiness of God is quite willing to confront its opposite, the power of the devil, is what this lesson is told for.

Yet in another sense this lesson has everything to do with us. The power of Christ that freed this man, and returned him to a calm mind, and into his relationships again, is precisely what Christ offers to anyone who has concluded limping is not so bad. For there is nothing that Satan would rather we doubt and continue to doubt, than that we are forgiven. There is no place that Satan would rather we not gather than right here, where forgiveness is proclaimed in Jesus' name.

There is nothing Satan would rather we believe and continue to believe than that the pounding in our chest, that knot in our stomach, that fatigue in our soul, those chilled or chilling relationships soured over something we've done, left undone, said or left unsaid, will never go away or ever get better. There is nothing Satan would rather we believe and continue to believe than that our situation is so unique, our dilemmas and disputes so deep seated, that Jesus would not want anything to do with us – or if he does, it's to judge us. Our lesson today tells us that this man began to be healed when Jesus began to say and continued to say that the demons should flee. Which is why there is nothing you do that is so vital as to say and continue to say, believe and continue to believe... *"I am forgiven for Jesus' sake."* No matter what I have done or suffer, Jesus wants everything to do with me – and to help me!

There is nothing we do here in this congregation so vital as to continue to snatch our young from the power of sin, death and the devil through baptism, and teach them about the Lord who did the snatching. There is nothing we do here that is so vital as to hear and continue to hear Jesus say; *"this is my body, given for you and all people for the forgiveness of sins,"* and then to come and snatch that forgiveness up each time it is presented to us.

For there is nothing we by our human nature doubt more than what we most want to believe; that by his divine nature, Jesus loves us. Do you want to be rid of that knot in your stomach, that pounding in your chest, that distraction in your head, that frenetic activity trying to busy yourself out of what your mind won't let go of, those drifting days or sleepless nights rehearsing over and over what you would have done or said *"if you could do it over again"*.

Do you want that extended to our congregation and those sacred assemblies called our families and our friendships? Then let me remind you once again....that at the name of Jesus, sin and despair beg for mercy...but are sent packing. Don't just take my word for it.... come up here again in a few minutes....and taste it for yourself. AMEN