

Sermon for Trinity 1 2022
Galatians 3:23-end/Luke 8:26-39

At first glance there may seem to be little connection between our two readings today. Luke's account of the deliverance of the Gerasene demoniac and Paul's talking about being prisoners of sin until we are released by faith in Jesus and become Children of God. However, as I read and studied and thought about them, I came to see that they are related because they are both about restoration and reconnection. Which is presumably why they have been put together as the lectionary readings for today, by people who are cleverer than me!

The man living in the tombs outside of the town was possessed by demons. Now there are some people who believe that all the examples of demon possession in the bible were either cases of epilepsy or some other physiological or psychological condition and of course they may be right. Others believe that people, even Christians can be troubled by demons even today, that is a big subject that I am not going to go into today. In the New Testament, most people who are described as having a demon, or being troubled by a demon are living in society, the affliction does not appear to take over their whole lives. Not so this man. He is described as being demon-possessed. Taken over by demons, something that was and is very rare. He was certainly not in his right mind, and we are told that he had been driven into solitary places, away from any kind of society. We know that this man was a Gentile because the region of the Gerasenes was a gentile area and because they were keeping pigs, which would of course have been unthinkable to Jews. As usually happened, the demon recognised Jesus, acknowledged Him as the Son of the Most High God, and pleaded with Him not to be tortured or sent to the abyss. Demons appear to instinctively know who Jesus is and His authority

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over them. And as we know Jesus allowed them to go into the pigs, who jumped off the cliff and were drowned.

But the point of the account is not the demons but the man. And what do we see happened to him? He had been separated from society and was living alone, but Jesus brings restoration. Jesus restored the man's dignity, he is no longer naked, He restored his sanity, he is found sitting at Jesus' feet in his right mind, and He restored him to his community.

Now the people of the region who had come out to see what had happened were overcome with fear and begged Jesus to go away. Jesus never forced Himself on anyone who didn't want Him then and He doesn't now, He left. The man begged to go with Him, but Jesus didn't just heal and restore him, he gave him a purpose. "Return home and tell how much God has done for you", Jesus told him, and he did just that. The people might not have been ready to receive Jesus, but they certainly heard about him and witnessed what He had done for that man.

Our reading from Galatians talks about how before we came to faith we were held in custody and the law was our guardian, the one who had a hold on us because we were guilty and had no way to be free from the guilt of our sins, the things we had done wrong. Sin can often separate us from people. I have people in my own family whose relationship is completely broken, and they never see or speak to each other. Sin destroys community in both small and sometimes catastrophic ways and the only way to be free of its influence is to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to set us free from sin and death. Jesus said in John chapter 8, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

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So, Paul tells us, in Christ Jesus (the Son), we are all children of God through faith. We were talking about this just a couple of weeks ago – we are sons and daughters of the King, princes, and princesses. Paul makes it clear though – baptism with water is not enough, we have to clothe ourselves with Christ, the NEB translates this as ‘put on Christ like a garment’ – Paul is talking about consciously taking on the nature of Christ. He goes on to state that in Christ we are all one. We belong to God as members of His family, and we also belong to each other and all the things that divide us are no longer sources of division. We are no longer divided by race, rank or position in society or gender. Now of course all these things still exist and aren’t bad in themselves. We are members of a nation, and it is not necessarily bad to be proud to be British, or French or Swiss or whatever. It might be a part of our identity – but that should no longer separate us from brothers and sisters from other nations. That divide is not there spiritually. As children of God, we are all citizens of Heaven and in Heaven we won’t be British. We won’t be taking over a corner of Heaven and making it a British enclave. Our values are not British values, but the values of the Kingdom of God and we must be living by those values now, not waiting until we die. There is no longer any division of gender. This has nothing to do with current debates about gender and I am not going to discuss them. Paul is talking about the divide in the ancient world between male and female, with women being at the very least second-class citizens. Even today, for all the progress that has been made, even in first world countries such as our own there is still a great disparity between men and women. But as children of God we are truly equal, no race declaring itself superior to any other race, no masters exploiting slaves, no men ill-treating or suppressing women in any

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way. In Christ we are all included as offspring of Abraham and children of the promise that we will be, that we are God's children forever. Like the Gerasene demoniac, in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are restored to our right minds, we are reclothed with the values of the Kingdom of God and we are restored to true community; which is unity with God and with each other, with all division removed. This doesn't mean we are clones for God, no we are all uniquely, individually created by Him and just as Jesus gave the demoniac a purpose, so he gives us a purpose. We too are meant to both show by our lives and to tell others about all that God has done for us.