

2016-06-19 Sue Diggory
Trinity 4 - Luke 8: 26 – 39

Three weeks ago we saw a slave healed, the much loved slave of the Centurion based in the area around Capernaum, two weeks ago a widow's son was raised from the dead in the nearby village of Nain and today we see another healing, the healing of a man who is in bondage to what we are told are a legion of demons, a man who is in chains and far from free.

Jesus and his friends have set out across the lake, to the other side, to Gentile territory and to the land of the Gerasenes. Why we are not told, but what we do know is that on the way they have encountered a terrible storm and the disciples have now witnessed not only the power of Jesus to heal and raise from the dead but the power to confront and rule over nature, leaving them to ask *"Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey them."* It truly must have been one of those 'what is going on now, moments,' a moment that brings a mix of emotions, relief, relief from the storm but also fear, fear at what has happened, fear because it is outside of their experience, fear because it has no logical explanation, fear because they know it is only God who has command over his creation, and fear because they still do not fully understand who Jesus really is, and fear because they do not know what he might do next.

And so the little fishing boat and its' passengers approaches the shore at a place where the steep cliffs go down to the sea and the nearest land to the lake's edge is full of tombs, it is a place that is on the edge, on the edge of the city, a place that is unclean as it is a place inhabited by the dead, it is not a place for the living. Yet as Jesus steps out of the boat we are told *"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."*

Here we have an encounter between Jesus and this man, this man who lived on the edge, a man living among the dead because those who were alive could or would not care for him. The local people of the Gerasenes no longer wanted to be associated with this man, a man so tormented and possessed that they could no long control him. They had tried to protect him and themselves by binding him with chains, but it did no good as he would continually break free and now the only way to cope was to let him roam free, free of their binding but not free of the demons who possessed him, free and apart from the community that feared him, but freed to the terrible loneliness of life as he

roamed the through the tombs along the shore of the lake in the land of the dead.

Were the disciples gripped with fear at this man's approach, we are so often afraid when we do not fully understand why a person behaves as they do, were they concerned for their safety as the man falls down before Jesus and bellows *"What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"* The man may not have known who Jesus was but the demons who possessed him did and they were fearful, fearful of what Jesus might do to them, fearful of where they may be sent, fearful of being sent back, back to where they had come from – the abyss – a place of eternal confinement!

"What is your name?" "Legion"

Legion, the word conjures up the image of a vast army. There were 6,000 soldiers in a Roman legion, and this poor man's identity has been so swamped, swamped and overtaken by the spirits that possessed him, the this was the only identity left to him, so it is not surprising that Jesus chooses to free this man from them and gives permission for the spirits to flee and enter the pigs.

And so the familiar story continues and the next we see and hear is the sound of stampeding pigs as the herd rushes down the hillside and to their death as they drown in the lake, and the sound of the swineherds running off to tell the towns folk and the local farmers what has happened.

By the time the local people arrive Jesus and the disciples have washed the man and found some clothes for him and they find him sitting at Jesus' feet, in his right mind and completely healed, but rather than being filled with joy at what had happened the people were filled with fear, filled with fear at what had happened, fear at what they did not understand, and no doubt fear at what Jesus might do next. The man may have been healed but the swineherds had lost their livelihoods and a valuable herd of pigs had drowned in the lake, so what would this man do next, what might happen to them if they allowed him to stay, no they had no intention to allow that and urged Jesus to get into the boat and leave. They had no desire to have their life disturbed any further!

The local people disliked having the routine of life disturbed, how do you feel about your life being disturbed? They had managed to contain this man amongst the tombs and life went peacefully on until Jesus arrived; and this filled them with fear and dislike for Jesus. More people dislike and fear the

presence of Jesus in their lives because he disturbs them and wants them to change, how do you feel about change I wonder? Did these people value the lives of their pigs more than the live of the man Jesus healed, the man who had lived for so long in chains either real or metaphorical, would they rather that Jesus had never reached the shoreline and got out of the boat, would they I wonder prefer he had just sailed by and left them alone – the demons most certainly would have done!

But what of the man who had been healed. *“The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, “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.*

Not surprisingly he wanted to go with Jesus, he wanted to get into the boat and become a follower, but Jesus sent him home. Christian witness, begins at home, it must begin in the place where we have been put, the place that God has set us. It is so much easier to live and speak for Jesus among people who do not know us. But we are called to witness, where Christ has set us, it is there that each one of us is called to witness for him, but if speaking out makes you fearful remember actions often speak louder than words, how we behave is as big a witness as what we say!

Last Sunday evening there was a confirmation service at Chevening Church where 31 people, including Sophie Banks and Tom Dargie said their own ‘Yes’ to their baptismal promises, their own yes to wanting to continue to journey with Jesus and to grow in their faith. Bishop James reminded them that the following day in many ways they would be the same, but that they would also be different, because they would now be people who had said their own ‘yes’ and as such were among those who were called to speak out for Christ in the place that they had been set, the home, the family, the office or the school, to show the love of Christ at work in their lives.

The demon possessed man in our story wanted to get into the boat and follow Christ, that would have been the easy option in many ways but in this case Jesus said no, stay, stay here and return to your home and show people what God has done for you, and we are told he went away telling everyone how much Jesus had done for him. Did he understand as the demons did that Jesus was the *“Son of the most High God”* or did he simply know that after his encounter with Jesus on the shore of Lake Galilee he had been freed, healed and made whole, that his ‘chains’ had fallen off and that he fully restored into being the person that God created him to be, an offer that is available to each one of us if we are prepared and willing to be continually transformed by the

loving presence of Christ in our lives.

Amen