

Deliverance in a Cemetery. A sermon preached as part of a series on Jesus' healings at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George on April 15, 2018 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: PSALM 42

PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11

LUKE 8:26-39

Last Sunday, Katharine spoke about the friends who let down the man through the roof so he could be at Jesus' feet.

Whether or not the man let down believed in the power and ability of Jesus to heal we do not know. **BUT HIS FRIENDS BELIEVED IN THAT POWER!**

It is a great story.

One so clearly told we can easily visualize the story as it unfolds.

Getting people,

Bringing people before Jesus so they may experience afresh Jesus' healing, compassion, worthiness in the eyes of God is what the healing ministry of Jesus was about then,

And it what the healing ministry of Jesus is still about today.

Jesus did not heal perfect people – which should encourage each and every one of us

He healed and heals yet, broken people

People broken by physical injury, long term and debilitating illnesses.

People who are emotionally and mentally unwell,
People who wrestle with crippling guilt over things said or done or not said or not done

How does the old Anglican Book of Common Prayer so memorably phrase that standard confession?

...we have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. And there is no health in us...

Do not those words resonate in your life?

They do in mine

Is not there some element of brokenness in each of us?

Do we not long to be healed?

To feel, to know the touch of Jesus

Do not we long for such a touch for others, as we hear these healing stories of Jesus?

Watch and enter into the stories themselves?

I believe with increasing conviction that
*bringing people,
Bringing ourselves before Jesus,
Praying prayers for healing is just as crucial today –
even more so – than it was when Jesus physically walked
this earth!*

I know there are people who will tell us that the Lord's ability to heal died in the 1st century with Jesus' ascension

They are the same people who will tell you the Holy Spirit was present only to help the church gather and get started.

Well we know that the Spirit is still very active today,
So then, is the Lord's ability to heal.

We must never, never, ever assume that God does not and cannot intervene in this world – in the here and how

Specifically in the area of healing by the power of the risen Christ.

You and I know both know that the church cannot prescribe pharmaceutical help or set broken bones. Nevertheless, the Christian community – this or any other – has in its quiver one of the often underestimated and under utilized arrow of healing prayer

When we pray nothing never happens – read when we pray, something always happens

God does indeed both hear and answer our prayers.

Remember – as God's people it is our responsibility to pray – it is God's responsibility to heal!

This morning's healing story is a dramatic one.

So dramatic and memorable that 3 of the 4 Gospels record it almost word for word!

On one level,

The story can be seen as a cross between an episode in a graphic novel and a political cartoon.

You have tombs – a cemetery;

Chains and shackles and screams for effect

A naked crazy man living among them,

Talkative demons.

A charging herd of pigs doing a swan dive off a cliff.

Angry members of the porcine community

Freaked out locals

And a small riot

At the end of the story – a variety of reactions.

The porcine community up in arms and probably demanding compensation for their loss,

Confusion

A healed crazy man

All set in a land where Jesus as a Jew had no business being – for this was non-Jewish – Gentile territory

Certainly, some first century Jews would have loved this story

Un-kosher, unlucky and genuinely weird Gentiles on the “other side” –the far side of the lake of Galilee!

Pigs drowning themselves – no loss for observant Jews!

Pigs are unclean – they should all be drowned!
 Demons calling themselves “Legion” – good on you
 Jesus – a not so gentle poke at the despised and
 feared Roman occupation army
 For that is how so many viewed their Roman
 occupiers – demonic!

But,

This is not really a humorous story is it?

To first century readers then, or we who hear the
 story in chapter 8 today which begins with the
 phrase, **Then they arrived at the country of the
 Gerasenes which is opposite Galilee...**

As we seriously enter into the story, we realize very
 quickly that this is ANYTHING BUT a light
 interlude in Jesus’ Galilean ministry.

The naked man running about the tombs is
 truly a tragic individual.

We are never told what caused his behavior – we
 are only told the outward manifestations of his
 behavior.

Like so many cases of emotional and mental
 unwellness, the man had succeeded in terrorizing
 the village by just being in the area,

One can readily imagine if you were a villager
 you would have heard his screams and rants and
 seen him dashing about the cemetery!!]

Now, let's be clear about what this story in Luke 8 DOES NOT SAY, before we consider what this story does say to us today.

This is not a story that equates all mental illness to demon possession.

Read – *not all mentally or emotionally unwell people are demon possessed!*

The context and the content of this story do not allow that connection to be made.

Clearly the text does say the Gerasene man was demon possessed, but let me say this again for emphasis – THIS STORY DOES NOT MEAN ALL MENTALLY UNWELL PEOPLE ARE DEMON POSSESSED!!

What then does this story say to us?

I believe it is a reminder that the forces of evil are very real

It is against these forces that Jesus' healing ministry is directed.

Call such forces as the story does – Legion, or the evil one, or the devil – it matters not!

The truth remains that there was in Jesus day, Actually from Creation onward, the existence of a presence or person or reality that has only one purpose – *to turn us away from God and his promises* Including those promises of abundant life and those related to healing.

And this presence or reality of evil can use a variety of means to do just this-

- ✓ Confusion
- ✓ Chaos
- ✓ Apathy
- ✓ Indifference to God
- ✓ Misdirection
- ✓ Tyranny of the immediate – compulsive busyness
- ✓ Chronic pain and illness
- ✓ Anxiety
- ✓ Worry
- ✓ A spirit of unforgiveness
- ✓ Misplaced or wrongly placed priorities

And that is just a sampling

Evil is with us and is quite real.

And we are indeed foolish to either ignore its presence or to be obsessed about it.

I return again and again to the preface in C.S.

Lewis' Screwtape Letters

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors...

The story of the Geresene demonic and the whole of Jesus' work and ministry reminds us though that

evil does not and shall not triumph – however grim, nasty and scary the immediate situation or foreseeable future.

Yes, there will be struggle

Yes, it may well mean 2 steps forward and 4 back

Yes, there may be sorrow and tears

BUT the power that has the last word in this world and in the next is intricately intertwined with the name of Jesus.

From Philippians 2 which Katharine read moments ago.

**Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

Here in this story in Luke 8, as extreme as it is,
--Jesus has the last word

None of the powers except the love, grace and forgiveness of Jesus will prevail regardless of how we feel at this present moment!!!

I am also struck every time I hear this story – and this holds for all the healing stories of Jesus of the *deep, deep love of Jesus* for all people.

That compassion toward all and any really gives me hope about the future.

The Gerasene demonic was truly a tragic figure – ignored by everyone,

Left to his own devices

Mentally unstable,

Capable of only causing fear and terror in the village – what a sad, sad specimen of a human being!

Yet, the story tell us – Jesus makes a special and dangerous trip across the Sea of Galilee to listen,

To meet

And to heal the demonic on his turf as it were

A healing in a cemetery – remarkable!!

If you expand the reading to include the story that precedes it in the Gospel and the one that follows it,

It is among other things an account of Jesus' compassion in the midst of the most seemingly hopeless of situations.

A storm which rises suddenly on the Sea of Galilee rattles the fishermen/disciples

They do not think they are going to make it.

Yet, Jesus calms both the storm and his disciples.

What follows in Luke's account of the healing is one of the most dramatic and touching pictures of the depth of Jesus' compassion.

³⁵ Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. (vs 35)

How indeed so touching,

Yet significant is that final phrase

And they were afraid – I wonder how many of us would find ourselves in that grouping.

I wonder how many of us still see or experience a Godly healing and our first reaction is fear.

Then of course, Jesus goes back across the lake where he restores life to a little girl in between healing a sick woman .

Each of the situations, more or less hopeless, Yet the presence and touch of Jesus again and again proves the hopeless to be possible!

It is a remarkable and deeply moving story. But it is more,

I see it as an invitation, a call, a challenge to bring continually before Jesus those who are broken, Unwell and distressed.

Those who need a healing touch of Jesus.

Those among whom we include ourselves – for each of us are in some ways broken, unwell and in distress.

This is most certainly not the way Jesus intends or wants any of us to live. AMEN