

(Play the Refrain of There is A Balm in Gilead, once through)

The old Gospel Hymn "There Is a Balm In Gilead" describes Jesus as the salve "to make the wounded whole, there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul." SIN-SICK SOUL describes the characters in this morning's reading. Different from the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus is going across the Sea of Galilee to the Gentiles, healing throughout the Judean countryside, then back; in Luke this is the occasion, where after calming the wind and waters of a storm, Jesus gets out of the boat in a region of the Gentiles.

Everything about this setting says unclean, this is not kosher, this is The Lion King with Scar as Ruler, this is a place of sin-sick souls. The disciples were not greeted by followers at the pier of a Jewish city, Jesus steps out on the shore, out of town, near the tombs and catacombs, and a very-troubled-man comes toward Jesus. This beast-of-a-man no longer wore clothes, no longer lived in a house or slept in a bed. The people had tried to chain him down from causing trouble, but he had broken their chains, and harmed himself with self-mutilation. There is a difficulty in this text, because the man has lost his identity, such that at several places it's hard to tell whether Jesus is talking to the man or speaking with the demons. What a subtle and powerful image, because there are times when we feel as if we have lost our humanity, we are our Cancer, our illness, our Circumstance. Trying to speak to the man's humanity, Jesus asks his name? But he replied "LEGION". In the Roman Army, a Legion represented a military unit of 6000 soldiers.

Now historically, there is a good deal known about this location, because according to 1st-Century Historian Josephus author the book The Jewish Wars, the place name of Gerasene was more than the location of the Roman Garrison. In or about the year 60, in response to Jewish Revolts against the Empire, the Roman General Vespasian, used his Legion called the 10th Fretensis to destroy Gerasene. The Legion massacred 1,000 young men, imprisoning their families, then burned the villages throughout the region. The 10th Fretensis were among those who destroyed Jerusalem in the year 70, and over years of attacks repeatedly reconquered Palestine (much like Russia attacking Ukraine in our time). There are two other curiosities according to Josephus: the Roman Legion that was stationed at Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate for the Crucifixion of a Nazarene Carpenter turned Rabbi at Passover WAS Legion 10 Fretensis. Because of their attacks on all things Jewish, the animal insignia on the Banner of the 10th Fretensis of Rome was that of a Wild Boar. But also different from other translations, I had our staff change the translation here from PIGS to BOARS, because these were not domesticated pink pigs like Porky or Arnold; Wild Boars are one of the oldest species of mammals, which like the Roman Legion had adapted to consume garbage across the earth.

The text does not say whether the troubled man who came to Jesus was one of the few Jewish survivors of this massacre, or whether he was a Gentile, Roman Legion Soldier traumatized by what they had done. This is a passage about FEAR. The military killing of 1,000 men and boys, the destruction of every village and town, herding up the women and children survivors to put in prison camps, even the Sacred City of Jerusalem leveled and burned. We remember the shock and horror, the trauma we felt when the World Trade Center was attacked... We have become so accustomed to Bombings and Mass Murders, we need to recall what was stated back at those earlier events, that "Terrorists win when they can cause masses to live in fear, when fear sickens our very souls. The only way we win is to trust and believe! We beat Terrorists and Mass Murderers when, rather than succumbing to fear and distrust, WE TRUST & BELIEVE."

However, the fear of the Demons was not death, because according to Judaism ALL THINGS THAT DIE GO TO BE WITH GOD, No their fear was to be cast into the Abyss. What exactly was meant by Abyss, no one seems to know, but I have to believe that all of us, even "demons," want our lives to have had meaning, we do not want to die alone or forgot. It is one matter to die, we are mortal; it is a different matter to be

forgotten, your presence disappearing into an Abyss. It is not that Jesus wished the death of the boars; but in demonstration of just how tormented this man had been, the 1,000 or 6,000 tormented souls that had all occupied this man as LEGION entered the Herd of Boar, causing all of them to run off the cliff.

We began this morning by stating that "SIN-SICK SOULS" described the characters in this reading. What I meant by that was not only: the perceived central character, the tormented man, LEGION; but also when all the people of that place found he was in his right mind, sitting, fully-clothed in conversation with Jesus, THEY WERE AFRAID and they asked Jesus to leave because they were so afraid. They did not throw a party killing a fatted calf like the Father of the Prodigal, they did not even share a Garden Salad (I am sorry, but we have named the slaughter of many animals this morning). To the people of Gerasene, this was not the occasion of "this your brother who was lost is found!" Instead, as strange and frightening as he had been, they had developed ways of dealing with this creature. They chained him down! They exiled him from their village, to live among the tombs and catacombs of the dead! Nobody asked "This Jesus from across the Sea" to exorcise his demons, or change the way he was.

Having this man acting normal, raised all kinds of problems:

First and foremost, Change means we have to change in how we relate to him.

If he is rational, fully dressed, able to maintain a conversation with a Rabbi, a teacher of Jewish Law, then we can no longer neglect him as inhuman. We cannot chain him to one place outside our community.

We may have to let him in. We may need to talk with him and possibly care for him.

Our lives were easier treating him as we had always done, as someone different.

BUT Deeper, if he is no longer tormented, but is now whole, a creature of God like us, then we have to confront that WE TOO ARE tormented and wounded creatures, very much afraid.

AND at some point, we need to acknowledge and to own, that we abused him, by casting him out of our community, by chaining him with our fears, by having treated him as sick.

When I first announced my choice for Scriptures and Hymns for different weeks, someone rightly questioned: You are preaching about the Demoniac on Father's Day? But underneath everything else, in addition to being a passage about FEAR, this is a story about being FAMILY and being COMMUNITY.

The last 2 years of Isolation and fear, was not NORMAL.

Living with the last 20 years of Terrorism and attacks, causing us to live in fear, was not NORMAL.

AS traumatic as this has been, more than facing INFLATION, possibilities of RECESSION, On-Going Months of War, HEARINGS and VIOLENCE that we are helpless to stop, we as a people have developed "SIN-SICK SOULS" that effect our families and our community in how we approach LIFE.

There is a delightful twist at the end of this passage, naming that Jesus told the healed man to "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." And the man went and told all how much Jesus had done for him. Which indicates that for him, relationship with Jesus was personal.

Ultimately, what Jesus does is to transform this from a HEALING STORY, or an EXORCISM, to a story about FORGIVENESS. Because for the Healed Man, to be sent to this same community that had exiled him, the people who chained him and left him for Dead, to tell them about the great gift he received that is available to us all, that is a story of FORGIVENESS.