

All Saints Episcopal Church

Steenrijk

Leidenstraat at Heelsumstratt

Willemstad, Curacao

The Episcopal Diocese of Venezuela

DRAFT

“Save us from the evil one”

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

Proper 7 (C)

The Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 19, 2022

The Holy Gospel according to Luke 8:26-39

Jesus and his disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, 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. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me" -- for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the

wilds.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission.

Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 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. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 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.

Let us pray. Come to us, Lord Jesus, and heal our minds and bodies and fill our hearts with your joy. We pray for a just peace in Europe, that Russia and the Ukraine can coexist without war. Hear our prayers, Dear Lord. Amen and Amen.

From September 11, 2001, to June of 2002 I served as a Chaplain at the World Trade Center in Manhattan, New York, near where Jan and I lived. It was a harrowing time, no one knew what would happen next, and animosity against the Islamic World was high. As it turns out, it was not the Islamic World that was behind the attack, but it was the evil agitating the same

aggressor that we see in the Ukraine today who cleverly hid behind Osama ben Laden and several others on that fateful September 11 in 2001. Evil seems to raise its ugly head at various times and in various places, often disguising itself in clever ways.

The atrocities of war are one of evil's manifestations.

As I reflected on today's gospel, I note how temporary was the drowning of the demons as the pigs ran over the cliff into the Sea of Galilee, a land locked sea that is many miles away from the Mediterranean. But somehow, the forces of evil were not contained by that gesture Jesus made with the pigs. Jesus did not

send them into the Abyss. But the story was seized upon by the Jews of the time who were dead set against eating pork, showing that indeed Jesus was not fond of the pig either, but missing the point that evil cannot be drowned, but evil just keeps coming back again and again. Evil finally murdered Jesus on the cross, the revenge perhaps for being dumped into the sea at an earlier time by Jesus. Evil always tries to keep the upper hand, but of course, evil mistook Jesus' death to be evil's final victory. But instead, evil was defeated for all of eternity by it's evil deed done to our Lord. On the third day Jesus rose from the grave to show how pitiful is evil's dominion.

A few years after 9-11, I and many others breathed a sigh of relief just like those swineherd-ers did when they asked Jesus to leave them alone. The body of Osama ben Laden was dumped into the Atlantic Ocean, but the evil behind his deeds was not at all contained. War still boldly lifts its ugly head today, not only in the Ukraine but in schools and churches across the United States and elsewhere. Evil always is looking for a way to cause trouble.

As I shadow a kidney doctor in the United States, we encounter various forms of evil. Sadly it is often in terms of drug overdoses or addicts using each other's needles. But my

encounter of evil sometimes comes in the form of a human person whose mind has been overtaken. ‘They are not themselves’ is how their spouses and close relatives note. And the spouses and relative feel so guilty. That of course is one’s of evil’s tricks, to turn humans on themselves, as though we were responsible for alzheimers or whatever may affect our loved one’s mind or body. ‘My wife now is always angry’ is one observation. In fact his wife has alzheimers disease and is angry because she can no longer communicate her needs and feelings other than by anger.

Evil is not imagined; evil is very real. As one cleric has noted, just add the letter “D” on

the front, and it becomes apparent that satan, the devil, hides behind whatever he can find as a shield to mislead us.

So what are the antidotes to evil? One antidote is to call evil for what it is, evil. A person can be inhabited by evil, as we see in many of the recent homicides on the news. It is so enticing to say the evil deed was because of the evil person, when in fact the person for one reason or another became a vessel for evil; then evil uses that person to strike others, physically or mentally.

There was an American comedian who always got a laugh when he said, “The devil made me do it.”

But of course we are not at all so helpless since the Lord is always there to help us in times of temptation if we only will receive the Lord's help. It is when we deny God's power against evil that we then step into the realm of evil where satan surely reigns. But through Jesus we can find peace and forgiveness.

Some of my classmates become distraught over an exam. I try to console them by noting that no exam is ever perfect or purely good. An exam cannot be a final judge of anyone, and if an exam is used to discourage students who are intent on doing good, it is the exam that is at fault. Maybe more efficient study habits will help, but, ultimately, no examination will ever

be perfect, and indeed exams can be used to harm both students and faculty. The issue is how something is taught and how something is learned. Sometimes the two actions work together, but sometimes they are at complete odds with each other. Passing or not passing an exam does not have anything to do with whether we are good or bad people. But sometimes examiners do not acknowledge the frailty of every single exam. An exam which teaches is oftentimes good, regardless of the grade. And if one cannot learn from an examination, the examination is probably faulty. Some exams are good to measure progress, but others are useless measures. And examinations are

oftentimes used to cause barriers for minorities, sad to say.

But evil can raise its ugly head in a myriad of ways. That is why we are encouraged to pray the Lord's Prayer at least once a day. An older less accurate version of the Lord's Prayer said, "lead us not into temptation", as though we are expecting the Lord to lead us "into" temptation, which is never the case. So the prayer is now more often prayed, "Save us from the time of trial", but even that turn of phrase implies that we cannot find our way into evil which we oftentimes do without using an ounce of the Lord's power over evil. We just jump headlong into evil as though the Lord "made us do it."

But our all-powerful God can overcome all our shortcomings and all of evil's weaknesses.

So, if we are facing evil in our lives, let us pray even more fervently for the Lord to give us the strength of resistance to evil. We cannot blame the Lord for what we do without the Lord.

As we help others gain strength over evil, we must also always be on the outlook of being "infected" ourselves. Evil can look so attractive. Evil can wear nearly an infinite number of disguises.

And should we fall, or run, into evil, we must extricate ourselves from evil's grasp; we must pull back forcefully from evil, with the Lord's

help. And if we have ever hurt someone, then we need to make restitution before coming to the Lord's table, not ignoring our sins, but recognizing our sinful nature and seek the other person's forgiveness as well as God's forgiveness. Love our neighbor as ourselves.

Let us not be fooled by the devil's tricks. But let us resist evil in every way and in every place and time. Amen.

“Save us from the evil one”

The Holy Gospel according to Luke 8:26-39

Proper 7 (C)

Description: Our all-powerful God can help us overcome all our shortcomings. Through Jesus Christ we can find peace and forgiveness. But let us always also seek forgiveness from those whom we may have offended.

Tags: Lord, Jesus, God, strength, trial, exam, student, table, forgiveness, resist, love, neighbor

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church

419 South Street

New Providence, New Jersey 07974

2 Pentecost: Proper 7 (C)

June 23, 2019

“Christ can heal the mind”

DRAFT

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

The Holy Gospel according to

Luke 8:26-39

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, 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. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me”—for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. Now there on the

hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So, he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 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. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the

Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So, he got into the boat and returned. 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.

Touch our hearts, minds, feelings, and spirits, O Mighty Healer, God of all gods, King of all kings, Lord of all lords, Emanuel, God among us, God beside us, and God with us, through Christ we pray. Amen.

A few years ago, I was at the bus terminal of Newark Penn Station trying to buy a ticket to send a homeless person safely back home on a bus to some of their family members who could care for them. As I stood in the ticket line to buy the bus ticket, the person in front of me seemed to lash out at the ticket salesperson with a series of curse words and invectives that ‘colored the air very purple’. I was shocked at the loud and foul language of the person standing at the ticket counter. But to my utter amazement, the ticket clerk quietly listened very carefully to what the foul- mouthed person was saying, and to my total astonishment he replied

to the ticket buyer, ‘So that is one round trip ticket to Springfield, correct?’ Somehow the ticket seller was patiently able to discern that the seemingly outrageously angry man had Tourette’s Syndrome which rendered him incapable of proper English that evidenced itself in a whole series of curse words. Tourette’s Syndrome is one of the mental illnesses that still baffles psychologists, and still little progress has been made in helping those suffering from that syndrome find effective treatment, although there are some new pharmaceutical inventions that may become helpful in the next few years. Tourette’s is one of several mental illnesses which would have been called ‘demons’ in

Jesus' time. And the language disability is not the most observed feature of Tourette's but rather tics or involuntary movements are more characteristic of this syndrome which affects some.

In my first year of medical school neurophysiology class we learned that schizophrenic persons not only can have a second personality, but that that personality can have its own immunological system that is not the same as the other personality. When the second personality is called forth and given a specific antigen, its immune system identifies that antigen and then begins to build immune

defenses against that antigen. However, when the other, or another personality begins to dominate, that personality does not have immunity against that antigen. Thus, the immunological system is under the control of the neurological system. And indeed in a way there would be two separate entities inhabiting the same body by virtue of separate and distinct neurologies. The implications of these findings may be profound. One possibility is that one personality may have immunity against certain cancer cells and is able to produce what is called, “remission”. But the other personality will not have that immunity and the cancer cells will begin to grow again when the person is

controlled by that alternate personality. That would mean that the challenge of cancer may be a challenge of at least two of our personalities, one which is confident of defeating the cancer, and one which is fearful and thus susceptible to it. Thus, our state of mind may be the determining factor for many cancers and other immunological diseases.

A few years ago, I was at a diocesan retreat to train people how to help churches make pastoral transitions. Part of our learning was that the way we perceive and respond to personality problems can have a major influence on the success of the outcome.

And the way we perceive and react to a traumatic situation can have a serious but potentially life-sparing result for the outcome. If we panic and only focus on the trauma and internalize how that trauma and pain could have affected us had we been the injured person, then our real response would have been contrary to what a life-giving response in that situation would have been. Panic, in other words, is usually unproductive and is often even life threatening. Remaining calm and coming up with a preferred solution would be a far more healing approach.

In our Gospel lesson today, when Jesus encounters the demoniac, he does not recoil

with horror at the stark nakedness of this possessed man; instead Jesus focuses on getting control of the causal factor. Jesus focuses on the basic reason for the man's mental disability and seeks the name of the personality that is controlling the demoniac's behavior. The Legion of demons respond to Jesus' request for identity, and the demons realize they are in the presence of a 'higher spiritual power' that can cast demons into the "abyss", the place where demons can never escape. Instead the demons choose unclean animals, hogs, and escape into the sea, where only the hogs die. Drowning rarely if ever kills a demonic force. Osama's body was cast into the sea, but the forces of evil

he embodied became even more forceful in the aftermath. Only a higher power can control evil, and Jesus Christ is that higher power, bar none.

Jesus did not ignore the poor man's malady but immediately began to cast out the demon; the demon responded, "I beg you, do not torment me." Even demons fear the might of God who can cast them eternally into the "abyss", the place of weeping and wailing which no one and no thing can exit. And Jesus is, in a way, kind to the demons as he does not prevent them drowning a herd of hogs just to get away; their ultimate destruction was kept for another day—even Jesus has pity on sick and

sickening demons. Jesus gave the demons “permission” to inhabit the unclean swineherd. It is actually a playful Jewish joke that unclean spirits are permitted by Jesus to inhabit unclean farm animals, pigs or hogs, which no self-respecting religious Jew would ever see fit to eat or associate with. That Jesus was in Gentile country gives a Jewish person a wink that those Gentiles who know nothing about what is dietarily clean and what is unclean.

I have from time to time encountered people who would fit the description of being ‘demon possessed’. If a person suffered cruel abuse as a child or teenager, the wounds are deep and troubling. Alcohol and other substances remove

the person's normal ability to contain their demons, but in an inebriated state, all control is lost, and the demon or alternate personality or wild thought suddenly takes control. The result can be violent or at least very disconcerting.

Alzheimer's is one mental malady that was not even described or recognized a few decades ago. Now it is the commonly used term for all sorts of brain anomalies which produce severe forgetfulness. As a seminarian years ago, I discovered that one of our parishioners had been put into a mental hospital by the Rector while I was on vacation. I could not find out why, there were no written records, and when I talked to

her she sounded completely OK. So I got her discharged from the hospital into the hands of a full duty care nurse. However, the parishioner's behavior deteriorated so much in three days that the nurse quit, and then I as a seminarian had full charge of her case as well as trying to go full time to seminary, and she was indeed a handful. In the end, probably over a hundred other parishioners volunteered to care for her as we sought her admission to the nursing home where she had been on the board of directors. However, Alzheimer's was not on anyone's 'radar screen' at that early time, and the nursing home was unwilling to care for her. So, our church took over in marvelous ways by visiting

her every day seven days a week, and with the help of two very dedicated nurses aides from the Seventh Day Adventist Church, we were able to care for her for many months until the nursing home opened a complete floor to care for Alzheimer's patients. When this malady strikes, the best way I found to be able to care for such a patient was to live in their world; it would be a world that changed weekly and oftentimes daily, with unpredictable ups and downs. Mental illness is very challenging, to say the least.

Mental illness is still a major challenge in western society. We avoid it; we abhor it; but rarely do we proactively treat it; and over

extended time mental illness becomes less and less curable. A long-term schizophrenic has very little hope of healing, a psychiatrist confided to me. But in general, we as a society ignore signals of demon possession, of serious mental illness, and society is always less well off as a result. America needs to begin to focus on the treatment of mental illness as much as we focus on physical illness. Both can be life threatening; both can kill. Ignoring mental disease can be very traumatic for society.

Jesus however shows respect for the causes of mental illness in today's gospel. Jesus does not curse the demon, Jesus does not ignore the demon; instead, Jesus begins to build a bridge of

respectability with the demon, acknowledging the demon by its name and acquiescing to the demon's fear of the abyss of eternal fire. Even demons get a second chance with Jesus. The forgiveness we see in today's story is beyond our wildest expectation, as Jesus gives the demon a way out that is not final and not eternally unredeemable.

What about us? Are we able to see through the facade of mental illness to the ultimately valuable and loveable person being controlled by the disease?

For God so loved the world, the normal as well as the not so normal, that whosoever should believe in him shall have life eternal.

Amen.

“Why do we look for the living among the dead”

Description: Christ Jesus was raised from the dead to heal us, to encourage us, and to give us with him life everlasting.

Tags: Jesus, Christ, peace, healing, pain, children, cancer, war, temporary, death, rock, anchor, refuge, creation, creator, life, pain, living