

### **The First Reading is Psalm 42:1-8**

<sup>1</sup> As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.

<sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold the face of God?

<sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food day and night,  
while people say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

<sup>4</sup> These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:  
how I went with the throng,  
and led them in procession to the house of God,  
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,  
a multitude keeping festival.

<sup>5</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help <sup>6</sup> and my God.

My soul is cast down within me; therefore, I remember you  
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts;  
all your waves and your billows have gone over me.

<sup>8</sup> By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me,  
a prayer to the God of my life.

<sup>9</sup> I say to God, my rock, "Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I walk about mournfully  
because the enemy oppresses me?"

<sup>10</sup> As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me,  
while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

<sup>11</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.

### **The Second Reading is Luke 8:26-39**

<sup>26</sup> Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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" — <sup>29</sup> 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.) <sup>30</sup> ***Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him.*** <sup>31</sup> ***They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.***

<sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup> ***“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.***

### **The Message is entitled, “*Work to be Done*”**

This story is filled with images, if only we let our imaginations run wild. Jesus and the disciples arrive on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee in the country of the Gerasenes. It has been a rough journey from Galilee, for while they were sailing Jesus fell asleep. Out of nowhere a wind-storm swept down on the lake and fear took hold of the disciples, as water began to swamp their boat.

The Sea of Galilee is 8 miles across and 13 miles long and the white caps can be fierce. I know, because I have seen them for myself. I couldn't imagine being in a small boat in the middle of that expanse of water in a storm. I, too, would have been afraid of the boat succumbing to the storm.

In the midst of their fears, the disciples awaken Jesus only to hear a rebuke from him, “Where is your faith?” Awakened Jesus rebukes the whipping wind and the raging waves and they cease. The stillness would have been surreal, even though the disciples had seen Jesus heal a paralytic and raise the dead, yet now even the winds and the waves bow to his command. If I had been on that boat, I imagine my heart would have been pounding and my mind would have been racing, as I tried to wrap my brain around the experience and the one who stilled the storm.

“Then Jesus and the disciples safely arrived on the shores of the Gerasenes.” Still reeling from their battered and bewildering crossing, then Jesus and the disciples encounter “a man of the city who had demons.” Now our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears probably struggle with the terminology of demons, unless we are in the movie theater or watching sci-fi fantasy TV. But for Luke and his contemporaries, the Salt Project Commentary reminds us, that their world was riddled with demons who distorted creation and overwhelmed hearts and minds. Their world was overrun with death-dealing forces and ours is too. We only need to think of how addiction overwhelms individuals and families; how racism and sexism, both explicit and implicit forms, degrade the belovedness of the other; or how anger consumes and envy devours. We may not

call these things demons, but they certainly are demonic, for they are destructive and death-dealing.

The man in our biblical story this morning is suffering. He by definition was “on the streets” or homeless. He had been cast out of society, as he didn’t conform to its rules. His community had even shackled him at times in an attempt to control his outbursts. He was completely and utterly isolated from community, as he wandered among the tombs. Not only was he homeless, but he was also naked. I imagine fear was a constant companion as he wrestled with the demons within him. When he called himself Legion, we should understand that a Roman “legion” had six thousand soldiers. Imagine feeling occupied by so many personalities – a legion within you. Of course, the man wouldn’t be in his right mind.

Although the man struggled to hold onto reality, the demons within immediately recognized Jesus. They begged Jesus not to order them back to the abyss. Instead they ask to enter a herd of swine. I find it intriguing that Jesus grants the demons their groveling request. Instead of the abyss, the demons occupy swine. Freed from the legion of demons, the man is made whole.

But what about the poor swine? Although, I have never had a pig for a pet, I understand that they are pretty smart. As far as our story goes, it’s not the type of animal that is unsettling; it is the fact that Jesus gives permission to the demons to enter them and this leads to the animals’ death. If this part of the story makes any sense, it could be that a swine is already unclean according to Jewish customs. Yet, this doesn’t really work, because the swine belong to the Gentile Gerasenes. Commentators actually say this whole swine episode would have been considered humorous, simply because pigs are not known for stampeding! We imagine one or more pigs just rooting around in slop, unphased by anything around them.

So, Luke must be getting at something deeper. Could it be, when the legion of demons from our story or the ones prevalent in our 21<sup>st</sup> century culture are let loose, they will drive us and our communities towards death and self-destruction, even if we are not prone to such actions? These demoniac forces among us are real, yet are we to resign ourselves to their presence? The biblical narrative moves from the fear of the overwhelmed disciples to the fear gripping the Gerasenes because Legion has been made whole.

Fear takes hold and relationships and community are broken apart. While the liberation and healing power of Jesus paves the way for restoration.

Yet, the man isn’t interested in being restored to his community. Instead he wants to hang out with Jesus. He desires to become part of Jesus’ entourage, moving from place to place, witnessing Jesus miraculously overcoming death-dealing forces.

His desire reminds me of the words of the psalmist, “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” The man doesn’t want his moment with Jesus to end. He has beheld the face of God. He has experienced healing and wholeness and he doesn’t want the power of the moment to fade. How can he prevent this from happening? Stick with Jesus. The man even begged to continually drink from the font of Living Water, forget my community, I want to be with you, Jesus.

I don't know if you have had an experience of feeling as if you were face to face with God, like this man. Or if you have experienced God's healing presence in your life like this man? Or you may have experienced God's presence in a way that satisfied a deep longing within you or quenched your parched thirst for a meaningful relationship with the divine. God may have even removed death-dealing forces from the presence of your life.

I don't know if you have ever had an experience like this, but the man in our story did. The man who was healed, begged to stay with God. I have begged to stay in the palpable presence of God and so have many others. We all plead let us just experience again and again your healing wholeness pulsating through our lives, Jesus. Can't we just follow you, can't we just devote our lives to being present with you and call this our life's work?

Jesus clearly says, "No." He said, "Yes," to the demon's, but, "No," to the man healed and made whole. Jesus, knew that the man's healing was only part of his story and the rest of his story still needed to be written. And so, Jesus said, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." Return to your home and bear witness to God at work within you. Return to your home, for the restoration made possible by God at work within you is not just for you, it is for your community, too. God at work within us is not just personal, but communal. God at work within us has the power to heal individuals and whole communities as well.

Yet, are we willing to do this work? Remember, the community is filled with fear. I am certain that the community would prefer for the man to take leave with Jesus and embark for Galilee. It's great that you are all better, but we have lost our herds. Whatever power healed you frightened us. So, go, go and be made well somewhere else, thank you. Yet, Luke tells us that the man "went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him."

What about us? Where are we in this story? Are we the man made whole or the fearful Gerasene community? Are we still in the grip of death-dealing forces or are we ready to proclaim all that God has done in us?

There are so many ways for us to consider what this story means for us as a community. It brings to mind our new focus as a church, "Living the heart and mind of Christ, at the heart of the city." Are we willing to proclaim the healing and liberating work God has done in our lives? And are we willing to advance God's healing and liberating mission in our community?

Where is healing needed in our community? Who needs to be liberated? How might God be calling us to work together to impact our community?

I shared just a couple of weeks ago about a crisis unfolding in San Bernardino as approved asylum seekers were being delivered to the doorstep of the Catholic Cathedral. Not just one among us, be three among us went to find out more and in doing so helped direct some generous gifts contributed by this congregation. We found out that the location for the seekers has been moved into the desert closer to the border, but we also found out how we could respond to what was specifically needed. A group of six people shopped for what was needed this past week and the supplies will soon be delivered, so the goods can make their way to those in need. God was at work in us and through us, helping to restore the dignity of others.

Next Sunday, we will have the opportunity to hear about the Refresh and Renew shower ministry here in Redlands. God was at work in Vern Hoff and through him and many others, a

ministry of dignity has been birthed, for Refresh and Renew strongly believes in the restoration and renewal of broken lives such as the homeless man in our story today.

As we a community committed to the gospel by living the heart and mind of Christ, we should be continually asking ourselves: How can we more boldly and effectively stand against the world's death-dealing forces within us and within our communities? Are we filled with fear or resolve? Are we willing to trust that God's life-giving mission is already underway and that we are just being invited to take part in the restorative work made possible through the gospel?

"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?" Maybe, just maybe, because God is calling us to venture out to unfamiliar shores where God's restorative work has already begun. May we dare to proclaim the healing and liberating work God has done in our lives, as we advance God's mission of healing and wholeness in our community. Friends, there is much work to be done. Let's get to work. Amen.