

Week 4 March 17th**In Community with those on the margins****Welcome and announcements.**

Welcome to worship. We will not share Holy Communion in these Wednesday services. The next in-person worship will be this Thursday March 21st when we will celebrate Palm Sunday one week early. Please wear your mask.

Opening Prayer

Mender of division, you sent Christ to heal the world and to gather those on the margins. Bring your healing power to us. May we extend your power and grace to those separated from their communities and those longing for a tangible sign of your love. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 God teaches how-to live-in community.

⁷If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. ⁸You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.

Psalms 72:12-14 The psalmist writes of God's love for those in need

¹²For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.

¹³He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy. ¹⁴From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

John 3: 9-11 Jesus teaches that He will die and the people should care for each other

⁹Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." ¹⁰And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" ¹¹In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."

Mark 5:1-20 Jesus' crosses barriers to attend to those on the margins.

¹They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasene's. ²And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. ³He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; ⁴for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. ⁶When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; ⁷and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." ⁸For he had said to him, "Come out of the man,

you unclean spirit!" ⁹Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." ¹⁰He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; ¹²and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." ¹³So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

¹⁴The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. ¹⁶Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. ¹⁷Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. ¹⁸As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. ¹⁹But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." ²⁰And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Homily (Short message) The community of those in the margins

This is the fourth out of five in our Lenten series theme called "Created for Community." The first thing we often think about when we say the word 'community' is perhaps the town we live in, or the area of town or city, or maybe our community of family, friends and for those of us involved with church, we may include church in our thoughts of community. For those who study the Hebrew and Greek scriptures that we call the Christian bible it is important to note that there are over 2000 references to caring for God's various communities, plural. Scripture passages can be found about our community of creation, the community of all the saints, the community of our neighbors and today we will reflect on the community of those on the margins. Next week we will pull it all together with reflections on the community with Christ.

Those on the margins. Who are the people that we might identify as living on the margins? A "margin" is the edge or border of something. The "margins of society" refers to people who exist (figuratively, not physically) at the edges of society. People who live outside of socially accepted norms, or who lack social power. It can refer to: homeless people, poor people, criminals, mentally ill people, discriminated racial/religious groups, those who sexually identify beyond heterosexual, foreigners, and any other people that we may not identify with or fear. Phobias about those who live differently from us and we cannot identify with are all fear based. That fear fuels anxiety, prejudice, and discrimination. Since we can see over 2000 passages in scripture of God's people in the margins, and the scriptures are thousands of years old, we know this human condition of judging others is in our DNA. It is who we are and yet, the scriptures tell us to reject it and reach out to help and understand those we fear.

I was born into a predominately a white community with Northern European ancestors. In the school, church, and neighborhood, as a child, I saw few people on the margins. As I grew, I

met some extremely poor kids in my school. The Girl Scout troop I belonged to took clothes to them. I will never forget knowing someone in a violent home. My friend Jo was abused by her parents and one day her father shot and killed her mother and himself. I remember the first time that I met a transvestite, a man in woman's clothing, at the County social services center when taking my husband's relative to sign up for benefits. I remember the first black person that I hired to work for me, and I remember the first time I went to the home of lesbians, the home of gay men, the homes of prostitutes and drug dealers with my former job. I remember leading an all-white sales team in Springfield Illinois who would not let people of color join and I remember my sales team in Columbus Ohio that was two thirds black. Since then, I have met the homeless, addicts of all kinds and the mentally ill. I have been afraid of people in the past, but I must say that the older that I get and the more I get to know people, I am rarely afraid. They are all God's people.

The Gerasene demoniac in Mark's gospel was very scary. Chained like an animal and we can only guess that he suffered abuse or mental illness of some kind. He may have been diagnosed today as schizophrenic, bi-polar, Tourette syndrome any one of hundreds of psychological or sociological issues. When Jesus lived, all illnesses were diagnosed as demon possession. Evil spirits were attributed for all physical and mental diseases. Jesus becomes a powerful healer of a variety of illnesses of all kinds. Jesus teaches us that healing is possible for most all of God's people and we are called to live together with all of God's people leaving Jesus as judge. We are commissioned to care for those we often fear.

In this last year we have seen so many people rising in hate and fear. One place the marginalized are in visible is on our own southern border. Immigrants, especially more children than ever are coming to our border and wanting to enter. A friend of mine was terribly upset when she saw all the unaccompanied children coming to the border of the United States on the television. She called me and asked me what kind of parents would send their children? I answered parents who are afraid their children will be hurt or who are starving would send their children to food and safety. Who are these people and why are they rushing to live in our country she continued? I answered that they are various people from Central America.

The problem that we have seen on our southern border is extremely complicated and reflects people on the margins of community. These immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are no different than in ancient history. War and famine are the major reasons for people to become displaced. This is no different. Currently there are three countries that people are fleeing from in large numbers on the border: Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The people of Honduras are trying to escape poverty, unemployment, gang violence and natural disasters. The people of El Salvador are trying to escape the same issues. Guatemalans are hoping to escape poverty, violence and two major hurricanes. All these countries along with others suffer from government corruption and misinformation. Many struggling people are told that our borders are open and are fed misinformation for a fee. This crisis has been happening for decades, but the recent pandemic and leadership changes have fueled this surge. This is an overwhelming problem, and I will not give any thoughts on the way to handle the crisis. There

are over 100.000 people detained in camps at this time and 13.000 unaccompanied children so far. This is what community on the margins looks like. People who need community and need help. What we can do is pray for them and support agencies who are helping. Many people are turned away and they also need our prayers. As followers of Christ, we cannot look away. We are called to cross barriers of judgement as Jesus did. We are called to not judge but call on the Lord for help. Thanks be to God for the help many will receive, and we pray that God will be with those who are in need, on the margins of a life in need of hope. Our hope is in God. Amen.

Prayers for the Marginalized

Dear God, our journey through life is long and hard.

We cannot make this trip alone; we must walk together on the journey.

You promised to send us a helper, your Spirit.

Help us to see your Spirit in those you send to journey with us.

In the refugee family, seeking safety from violence, let us see your Spirit.

In the migrant worker, bringing food to our tables, let us see your Spirit.

In the asylum seeker, seeking justice for himself and his family, let us see your Spirit.

In the unaccompanied child, traveling in a dangerous world, let us see your Spirit.

Teach us to recognize that as we walk with each other, you are present.

Teach us to welcome not only the strangers in our midst but the gifts they bring as well:

the invitation to conversion, communion, and solidarity

This is the help you have sent: we are not alone.

We are together on the journey, and for this we give you thanks. Amen.

[SOURCE: Rev. Enock De Assis]

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Blessing

The Creator who fashions us together with all things,
the Christ who leads us into a new beloved community,
the Spirit who holds us in the communion of saints,
one God, ✠ bless you now and always. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace, joined together in Christ.

Thanks be to God.