

SPBX – June 19, 2016 – The Rev. Jamie Samilio - Seeing God in the every day.

These last few weeks Jesus has healed and raised a lot of people from physical death. The scriptures tell us that the dead will be given new life. Today we see two men, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament who were spiritually dead, be given new life.

In both stories, the **people involved had hit bottom**, were **exposed, marginalized, vulnerable, and afraid**. And after they **encounter God**, they are asked to go back **and resume normal lives**.

In the **Old Testament** Elijah is running for his life from Jezebel, and standing before God in strong winds, and withstanding fires and earthquakes. Elijah had hit bottom and asked God to take his life – these are words of desperation. The **quiet voice of God** in the Old Testament story told Elijah – who ran in fear for his life -- to return to his business, to **go back and continue his work**. Elijah had to **trust God** for protection, and **have faith** in order to return home to his **old life**.

In the Gospel, Jesus has “**Gone to the other side**” that is the land of the non-Jews and had a wild and controversial encounter with a man possessed by demons. **Like Elijah, the possessed man** too had hit bottom, **lower basement bottom** to be sure. Jesus, in healing the man, sent the “Legion” of demons that possessed him into a herd of swine, that then took a suicide dive off a cliff – and the **lively hood of the villagers with them**.

The **demons recognized Jesus** as having power over them and begged him not to send them into the abyss, but into the swine. **Who is this Jesus** who can return a man to his right mind, and who commands demons?

What intrigued me about this story was, that after driving the demons from the possessed man, after he was clothed and in his right mind, **he asked to follow Jesus, but Jesus said no**. Jesus told the man to return home, and to **resume a normal life**.

Jesus tells the man to “**declare how much God has done for you**” That is what the man does, but his message is **somewhat different**, “he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him” **The man is telling us that Jesus is no less than God himself**. I had to wonder if **some knowledge the demons** had in recognizing **Jesus as the God of all**, had remained with the man.

What further solidified the link between the Old and New Testament stories even more, were **Paul’s words to the Galatians**. “...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free...” **No more are we strangers on the “other side.”** We all belong to Christ, and we are all Abraham's offspring and heirs according to the promise.”

The man from the Gospel who had been possessed – he had been **naked before the whole town**, crazed and chained up for years. He needed a lot of faith and trust to face his family and neighbors. I wondered **how difficult it must have been** for him to hold his head up and return to the friends, family and life he once had?

While many in our world continue to believe in the **possibility of demon possession**, many more today feel possessed and **powerless** before **addictions** and **mental illnesses**. Just as we encounter God in our everyday live, I think we also encounter demons in many forms.

I started thinking about times in my life **when I had hit bottoms, felt frustrated, exposed, marginalized, vulnerable and afraid**. Then I realized that each time I got over a problem, worked out an issue, found a solution and was able to move on with my life, that **God was in all of those experiences with me – in the everyday**.

My friend Lyndi is a school teacher, and one day we were talking about church and prayer, and she said, **“Do you know what I pray for every morning before I go off to school?”** She said, I pray for **a normal day**, just a regular day where traffic is typical, the kids all feel well, the activities I set up work out, and no one gets sick at lunch or hurt on the playground. I do not pray to win the lottery, or to have extraordinary experiences and results from my work. I just pray that we are all safe, healthy, and if something does happen, that we have patience for and with each other, and that we work well together to get back on track. **She said, when she has a “normal” day, she knows God was there with her, just as surly as he is on days filled with more challenges.**

These scriptures beg the question, what is it like to encounter the divine and then just go on as if nothing had occurred – go and have a **normal day**. What occurred to me is that God is in the everyday, in the ordinary, and **if we look for God in our everyday, we will experience a life that is extraordinary.**

God speaks to me through music, and here is a “Talking Heads” song that expresses well how I often feel. It is called, interestingly enough, **“Once in a Lifetime”** **The song was** used in a Movie in 1986 with Nick Nolte and Better Midler, and Richard Dryfus, called **“Down and out in Beverly Hills.”**

I want to share some of the song lyrics with you:

And you may find yourself living in a shotgun shack

And you may find yourself in another part of the world

And you may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile

And you may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife

And you may ask yourself

Well...How did I get here?

And you may ask yourself, How do I work this?

Same as it ever was...

Time isn't holding us

Time isn't after us

Letting the days go by... Once in a lifetime

In the open scene, **Nick Nolte disconsolate bum, who had lost all hope for his life.** He had filled his filthy jacket pockets with rocks and jumped into the bottom of a swimming pool at the home of a nouveau riche, but completely dysfunctional family. The Father jumped in and saved the drowning bum, and then the family had pity on him and took him in.

Like the **two men in our scriptures today**, the Nick the bum, had lost all hope, but he was saved. Then, in turn, as the story unfolds day after day, we realize it is Nick, who then **saves the family (and their dog) by restoring their relationships** with each other, and with the world outside of themselves. By inviting in the **"OTHER"** in, the family was able to see themselves differently, and they strengthened their relationships with each other. God was in those "normal" days, changing each person in the movie, and God is in our normal days changing each of us.

All of this made me examine **how I respond and react** when, like Jesus in the boat, meet others, **"people on the other side" of who I am and how I live**, who are marginalized, are vulnerable or afraid. Am I as compassionate and as caring as I can be? **Do I take action and advocate on their behalf? Do I welcome them in?**

This has been a difficult week. It **began with Orlando and ends with the first anniversary of the Mother Emmanuel Church shootings.**

I asked myself what I had "done" in light of the shootings. Was this just another day? This was a big thing, can I just return to my normal life in light of what has happened to "others?"

Abraham Maslow, a pioneer psychologist, talked about our **different levels of conscious need: survival, security, belonging, and status.** If these four needs are met, only then can we move up to the level of **self-actualization**, and that is our need **to be and to do that**, which is **rewarding and fulfilling for us.** He says, "All of us, are at one of these levels at any given point in life." Jesus is there for us at all of these levels, no matter what we are facing. We just have to remember to meet all of our challenges, and **make our decisions from a position of love.**

I think the answer is that I can return to my normal life, **but I returned changed.** I am also called to tell the world **what God has done for me.** I can return to my normal life,

but I can no longer **ignore, and marginalize and oppress the “others” in my life,** because **we are all ‘others’** depending on where we find ourselves on life’s journey.

Look around you. **Who do you see?** Are you **brothers and sisters** to each other, or are you **strangers, “others” and outsiders?** Look around you when you leave here. Count the number of decedents of Abraham that you meet in your normal, everyday life, and remember that you are united with them in Christ.

What we do in our everyday lives, matters. Sometimes we need to take some extraordinary steps and stand up for Black lives Matter, Refugee Sanctuary, LGBT issues, Poverty, Hunger, Education, Homelessness, gun violence, natural resources conservation – pray for all of it, stand up for it all.

But keep in mind, that the biggest difference you may make in life, could come from a simple act of kindness toward a stranger, on a regular day.

Whenever you find yourself, wherever you are on your spiritual journey, God is there with you in the every day. God was with Elijah, God was with the possessed man, and God is here with us – and we are called to proclaim God’s love for us to the world, in our words, and in our actions. Amen