

Proper 7C
The Second Sunday after Pentecost
St. Luke 8:26-39
June 23rd, 2019
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Incurable?

How could this be? No one expected the Gerasene Demoniac to be healed. It was as though a sentence of having stage 4 cancer were passed upon him. He was doomed to live out his days wandering amongst the tombs, naked, and speaking crazy words and delusions. His condition cried out for compassion! Instead he was condemned to live a hopeless and difficult existence.

It seemed hopeless, at least according to first century experience. There are plenty of illnesses today that also invoke hopelessness, including mental illnesses like that of the Gerasene Demoniac.

Why this story? Why is it important for us to read and digest? What was Luke the physician thinking when he wrote it? What is the point of including it in the Gospel account?

My experience of the story is the possibility of hope in the face of hopelessness. And what makes hope possible is God. God can and does heal us. God brings real healing to our wounded souls. God restores hope, without which we are doomed to hopelessness and decline. We are stuck in a muddy depression, out of which there seems to be no escape.

Now it might seem that when we are in the throws of despair, it would also be a time to chuck our "faith" along with the rest of the things we are angry and frustrated about. After all, what sort of God would bring us to the brink of disaster, whether a seemingly incurable illness or an intractably bad situation either with finances, employment or a relationship that is very troubling? And so we would like to shake our fist at God and blame God for letting us squirm in the valley of the shadow of death and darkness. Why not? We need someone to blame, especially if the suffering is through no fault of our own or is simple unjust.

In the throws of despair, it is precisely the time to double down on your faith and to reach out to God in prayer for help. At the same time, it is an occasion that demands us to let go of our independence and reach out to others for the needed help. The answer here is, if you reach out for help,

you will more than likely get it. Keep trying until you do. Others may not help you directly, but will point you toward the well where you may drink in the life giving water that will bring back hope again on your horizon.

There was a dark, faith testing time in my life. I was angry as the status quo of my life dissolved and day-by-day, things kept getting worse and worse. I lost my job, a job that I loved and was happy doing. In the process, others were hurt, though I was not focused on that at the time. I lost my savings and most all of my money. I felt isolated, humiliated. I moved from a nice house in the suburbs to a church supported apartment in a less than stellar section of Hartford. I went from living in a several thousand square foot home, to a home of just about 400 square feet. I needed to sell off or give away years of possessions in just under four months, a daunting task as I had saved tons of stuff and collected a lot more. To top that off, my hairline started to recede and my hair started to turn grey. A few friends abandoned me, and I felt isolated from everyone. Worst of all, when I needed it the most, I felt abandoned and exiled from my church and that hurt me the most.

I often described my situation as like being on the inside of a toilet bowl with the water swishing around, pushing me further down each day, as I struggled to stay afloat and to not go down the drain. Not a pleasant image, but that is what it felt like. Hopeless, with no light at the end of the tunnel.

BUT I did not go down the drain. My life was far from over. And what appeared to be a horrible, destructive experience turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to me. And I found hope and my faith again, through this long dark journey in the valley of the shadow of death. In fact, though I was angry about what happened to me at first, I never lost my faith. I felt like Job. And I tried to remember his story. The one big take away from my experience was that I did not lose faith in God. I became closer, if that is believable.

What seemed like a horrible experience to me, took on a new face when I looked at it objectively and from other perspectives. I was burned out in my old job. I was angry on the inside, yet the anger was clouded over and suppressed. I allowed myself to be pulled in so many directions. It was time for a new direction in my life.

Unloading half or more of my possessions wasn't so bad either. Living simply and less burdened by all that junk was an excellent healing exercise which to this day I am still working upon. Simplicity became a new way of life for me, and simplicity has brought me healing. I learned living in a large

house wasn't that important and that having a small and more than adequate space was much more healing and manageable. I love my new one- bedroom home. It more than meets my needs! And being able to let go of things has helped me let go of things in my life when it becomes appropriate. When I no longer enjoyed going to my summer camp in Woodstock, and it became too much work for me, I let it go much more easily. And you know what, It feels great when you become unburdened in this way! Out of what seems like a defeat comes a victory of new life. Most of all, there comes with that, a new hope.

And my friends abandoning me? Well those who did were never really my friends, I discovered, and there were so few of those in the end, I could count them on one hand. What I woke up to was that when I reached out, many, many people were there to help and support me. God answered my prayers through them. There was one friend who helped me find a place to live. Another friend helped me work through vocational issues. Other friends held up mirrors for me, and polished them too, so I could see myself in an objective light. Yet another friend helped me find the new job I am working in today. And another friend stepped up to the plate and guided me through my new bachelor life with support and brotherly love that this only child needed. In fact, I cannot begin to list all the things my friends did for me, nor can I list all of the friends who helped me during this dark time. Time this morning does not permit. I can tell you I came away discovering that I was wealthy and rich beyond all imagining when it came to having friends. I was hardly suffering from being abandoned: I was blessed with an abundance of friends who cared about me.

And then there was the church. I learned that the relationship of faith is aided by the church, but it is not faith in the church, but rather faith in God. I had become institutionalized and had trapped God into a box of my own making. God is bigger than the Church, yet I was able to discover also how helpful the Church can be in my journey with God. Community and people matter and I discovered that this is what the Church is all about. Buildings and things are nice, but are only collateral, not the main support the Church can bring to us. I discovered church in gatherings of Christians outside of the building and walls of the Church. I discovered God in the faces of people like the Gerasene Demoniac in today's Gospel. People who are just like me, though much less fortunate in the hand of cards they have been dealt by life. Yet even there I discovered faith that astounded me.

And so like Job, I discovered that faith is more than our material success or failure or loss, more than our physical limitations, but rather, full of unlimited hope. That is healing for me. And I hold that out to you also today.

Why is this story included in the Gospel? Because if we really think about it, it is about you and me. We will all have an experience like this which will seem hopeless and demands healing. God is the healer and hope deliverer in these times of need and hopelessness. God delivers us hope. God helps us to heal, directly or through the hands of others working for God. Keep the faith, like Job! AMEN.