

5th Sunday after Pentecost  
"Light in the Darkness"  
Luke 8:26-39

There are some kinds of suffering in this world that you never forget. When I was studying to be a pastor I took a unit of C.P.E. which stands for: Clinical Pastoral Education. It's where you spend a semester in hospital setting, with supervisor who is a hospital chaplain and you do a series of rotations through all the different floors and all the different areas of medicine.

One experience I'll never forget was working with patients in the behavioral health or psychiatric area of the hospital. I'm sure most of it was the fact that it was new to me. I hadn't been around mental illness much.

As a pastor I get to celebrate a lot of special events in people's lives but illness is also a part of life. Mental illness is one of our body's illnesses just like anything else, like chronic back pain or heart disease.

And like any other illness, mental illness is tough. It's tough for the person who is suffering. It's tough for family members, and it's tough for anyone trying to help.

I think that's one of the reasons that years and years ago, those who were mentally ill were just ignored by society or segregated from society. People were threatened by something they didn't understand. And too often, it left those who were suffering out on the fringes of society.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is out somewhere among the Gerasenes. He is in Gentile territory...out on the fringe, away from the security of home.

And there Jesus meets a man who is also on the fringe of society, a man who has lost something in his life a man who is tormented. The man is in chains, to protect him from either hurting himself or others. Those chains signify what anyone feels, when they are trapped by something they don't know how to deal with.

And they have named him "Legion" because his personality has fragmented into many parts.

This is also a story of exorcism. The demons speak, screaming at Jesus. The demons beg Jesus not to send them back to the dark abyss from which they came.

They beg Jesus to let them depart into a herd of pigs.  
 Perhaps these demons beg to be sent into the swine because they feel that,  
 once they in these animals, they will be safe from Jesus. And when Jesus gives them  
 permission, they rush headlong into the sea thinking that they have escaped.

But in Luke, in the story right before this one,  
 Luke shows us that Jesus is master even of the wind and the sea.  
 So these forces of darkness can run, but they can't hide from the life-giving, power of Jesus.

When the swineherds saw what had happened,  
 they ran off and told everyone that they could find.  
 It's almost like the disciples who ran to tell their friends about Jesus, saying, "Come and see,  
 Come and see"

And then comes the part of the story that gets me every time I read it.  
 In verse 35 it says,

"Then the 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."

A man who had been tormented by darkness,  
 a man who been a danger to himself and everyone around him  
 was now peacefully sitting at Jesus feet.

A man who had been exiled from his community, who was living among the dead in tombs  
 now wanted to be one of Jesus' disciples.

"Go home and tell your people what God has done for you," Jesus tells the man.

And so this man, who had nothing,  
 this man, everyone had written off for dead, became God's messenger.  
 He became an evangelist.

He could now go home and tell everyone  
 that there is a power loose in the world, even greater than the power of his illness.

This is a story meant to be told and received gladly  
 among those who suffer the demons of mental illness and despair.  
 It's a story meant to be celebrated by family members who face this darkness with them.

The hope in this story is that there is no region immune from Jesus' power.  
 Jesus does not forsake those who are on the fringes of society, but seeks them out.  
 Jesus does not forsake those who are imprisoned by despair or depression,  
 but brings light to their darkness and healing.

We need to tell this story, not only to those who suffer in these ways,  
but also to tell it to ourselves.

It's a bit frightening to follow Jesus when he ventures out beyond our comfort zones.  
We may feel more comfortable at home, with those who are healthy.  
But those who are struggling, need us.

Especially in a society that still hasn't overcome the stigma,  
that for some reason doesn't consider diseases of the brain, a physical illness...  
as if our brain isn't part of our body.

Just as Jesus reached out to this man,  
Jesus is calling us to venture out beyond our comfort zones.

We need don't need to fear the dark places in life, because that's where Jesus is.

That's where Jesus is today.  
His power and his healing are real.

Let us all walk in His light. Amen