

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

June 23, 2019

Proper 7C / Ordinary 12C / Pentecost +2

The readings this week:

- 1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a ◦ Psalm 42 and 43
- Galatians 3:23-29 ◦ Luke 8:26-39

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Declare How Much God Has Done for You

It is, in the Northern Hemisphere, the season of summer – of fun on the water in many forms. We, ourselves, live by three lakes and spend much time in them, on them and by them at this time of year. Our impending visit to my sister's on the Saskatchewan prairies holds the promise of a visit to their cabin with boating, tubing, skiing and skipping stones on the to do list – unlike our last visit when our son learned to sandbag for the first time as his uncle and cousins sought to keep the lake water from drowning the cabin.

This last image of flooding and water out of control, unfortunately a prominent one on the weather news of late from so many different places, is, as N.T. Wright points out in the first chapter of his *Evil and the Justice of God*, a biblical symbol of the chaos evil creates – so much so that in the new creation of Revelation there is no sea (Rev. 21:1). Just before our text from Luke for this Sunday, Jesus and his disciples find themselves caught up in the chaos of a storm on the lake of Galilee. Jesus, apparently a sound sleeper, is not aware of the storm until his disciples awaken him in their full-fledged panic. Easily rebuking the wind and waves, a calm ensues while Jesus rebukes the lack of faith in his disciples and they wonder just who this guy is.

Faith – trust in God and in God's way – is at the core of all of the readings this Sunday: Elijah bemoans the lack of it in Israel, the Psalmist is trying desperately to hold on to it and Paul deems it the heart of the matter in the text from Galatians.

Stepping onto foreign ground on the opposite side of the lake, the demons know exactly who Jesus is – Son of the Most High God! They immediately recognize his power over them. They are the ones now panicked, clarifying Jesus' reaction on the lake to his disciples' lack of faith.

The unnamed man the demons have had power over has been living no life at all. Estranged from any form of community due to his erratic behavior, he lives among the dead. His only occasional companion a guard, his people at their wits end can only chain and shackle him. These he breaks to be driven into the wilderness, naked. Even switching from singular to plural as he addresses Jesus regarding himself demonstrates the bonds of chaos holding

him that no one can seem to break. His is one of the bleakest existences described in scripture...a hopeless situation.

A pause here allows us to contemplate the many situations in our personal and corporate lives that we view as intractable – beyond hope. Will there ever be peace in the Middle East? Will our addictions to drugs, alcohol, food, fame, wealth ever be cured? Will evil in all its Legion forms be finally and forever eradicated?

Jesus' answer in action, carried out as easily as he calmed the wild wind and waves, as easily as Creation is spoken into being at the beginning, is a resounding "YES!" Then those gentle shepherds, the swineherds, run to spread the word and people come to discover the miracle of a sane man, clothed and sitting at the feet of Jesus. Perhaps their reaction, to ask Jesus to leave, is partly motivated by the obvious economic impact of losing a large herd of pigs. More so, though, I think it mimics Peter's earlier reaction in Luke 5:8 when confronted with the overwhelming catch of fish: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" This sort of reaction is also seen in the Israelites to the presence of God on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:19) and in Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6:5). Gentiles they may be but they know when they have encountered the Holy. Perhaps it is also too much yet to contemplate that the status quo can indeed change, the personal and corporate implications of which can be frightening.

Jesus' pastoral response is to leave, without judgement or critique of the gentile's fearful reaction. He seems to understand. But he does not leave them without a witness; a witness they know and one whose debt of gratitude runs very deep. It is unlikely he will let them forget what God has done for him in Christ Jesus. And we know that word of mouth witness can be the most trustworthy and powerful kind.

The unnamed man, known to us only as the Gerasene demoniac, both is, and is a model for, the church. We are those who are aware of our deep debt of gratitude to Christ's saving work, who love the God we meet in Jesus and want to follow him, who go out to those we know and even those we don't in grateful, loving, powerfully trustworthy witness to what God has done, is doing and will yet do for us. Thanks be to God.

~ Janice Love, [Ekklesia Project](#)

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [1 Kings 19:1-4, \(5-7\), 8-15a](#)

Who are the Jezebels and the Baals of our present culture? When has your future, or the future of your church, been "radically redefined," as Brueggemann says, by an encounter with God? Who are the people around you whom you might not "count" when you're feeling alone in your ministry? When have you been tempted to complain to God about your calling? Are you "where God needs you to be"? [Weekly Seeds](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 42 and 43](#)

Do you find it hard to keep praying during troubled times in your life? Why or why not? What condition is the psalmist experiencing in Psalm 42:1-2? If the writer himself is likened to a deer, what do the dried up "streams" represent? Since the cause was not sin, what elements appear to have triggered the psalmist's condition? How might each "trigger" factor apply to you today? What does the psalmist do to face this condition? Psalms 42 & 43 point us to the true hope we can have in the midst of trouble. What is that hope and how does the Gospel of Jesus help deepen our understanding of that hope? Why is it important for us to process our suffering and troubled times through prayer? [Coonabarabran Presbyterian Church](#)



Healing requires Confrontation - and bold truth telling. If you can't name the disease, how can you find the proper cure? Perhaps it takes a radical withdrawal into the desert, or living naked among the tombs to isolate a problem so enmeshed with everything else in life and culture. Here, evil finds its name revealed, and, shouting and protesting in fear, trembles in the presence of Holiness. Here, you "take a closer look at the things and people one would rather not see, to face situations one would rather avoid, to answer questions one would rather forget."

And after that isolation, Restoration may require a slow crawl up from the deep. And even then, toward nothing more luminous or ordinary than starlight (meditation two).

But any restoration, any healing, any miracle of Love belongs not to you alone, but to the world - especially those most in need of the Love which you now bear.

Healed, Restored, Sent, (again and again)

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

3rd Reading: [Galatians 3:23-29](#)

If you had multiple children or grandchildren, and one of them came up to you and asked "which one of us do you love the best?" what would you say and why? The "guardian" Paul speaks of was a slave or servant who watched over a child until they were old enough to safely make decisions on their own. In what ways is this an appropriate image for the Law? Paul also says we were "captive" or "in custody" under the Law. These images imply that we were limited or not free in some way, so what do you think that meant? In what ways is "clothing yourselves with Christ an appropriate image for what Jesus accomplished? In what ways does Jesus make us one, despite our differences? [Faith Element](#)

4th Reading: [Luke 8:26-39](#)

What was the full effect of the demon-possession on the man? How had this excluded him from society and how was he experiencing immense suffering? What do you think the man with the evil spirit thought when he saw Jesus? How is Jesus identified? Is this significant? Does anything strike you about the confrontation between Jesus and the demoniac? Why did the man both fall at Jesus' feet and beg not to be tortured? How does this reflect the battle going on within him? Are people today – who suffer in different ways – excluded from society? How about the church? How about your church? [Anglican Church of Noosa](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

O God who is greater than the most powerful forces in this world,
enable us to be still and know that You are God.
O Lord who answers out of the whirlwind of everyday life,
breathe in us Your Holy Spirit to strengthen, comfort, and guide us in the midst of the storm.
O still, small voice, speak to us this hour that we might become makers of Your peace in our homes, in our communities, in our world.
We pray all this in the name of the One who calmed the raging sea. Amen.

~ [My Redeemer Lives](#)