

6.22.2025 Pentecost 2

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Isaiah 65:1-9; Psalm 22:19-28; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39

“All of you are one in Christ Jesus”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today’s readings center upon God’s mission of love to all nations and peoples. To better understand the context of today’s gospel, let’s return to verse 22, which reads, “*One day he got into a boat with his disciples and said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side of the lake.’*” Jesus was intent upon crossing a natural boundary of a lake to reach someone on other side. In crossing the lake, their boat encountered a storm, foreshadowing the “spiritual storm” of the man possessed by an unclean spirit. Everything about these two intertwined stories, suggests a world in need of the peace that Jesus gives.

Upon getting out of the boat, Jesus was met by a man possessed by an unclean spirit. The man was naked and lived, not in a house or even in a cave, but in the tombs. Like the time Jesus stood before the tomb of Lazarus and shouted, “*Come out!*” Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man, who cried out to Jesus, “*What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.*” When Jesus asked the man his name, he replied, “*Legion,*” for many demons had entered him. Imagine the torment this man felt. He had been chained and shackled, yet no fetters could hold him.

This man must have had family and friends, people who loved him, yet we don’t know what had happened in his life to have caused his distress and mental illness. His community had rejected him, pushing him onto the margins. Now when they saw the man sitting clothed and in his right mind, they became afraid of Jesus. Jesus had given the man inner peace, and it seems natural that he also wanted to stay close to Jesus.

In telling the man to return home and tell others what God had done for him, Jesus is foreshadowing his commissioning of Mary at the tomb to “*Go and tell,*” and his sending the disciples to all nations to make disciples and baptize. In this story, we clearly see Jesus going to places of death, to those tomb-like places that humanity finds itself walled into. Jesus comes not with war or violence, but with peace and healing.

I see it all around me – the walking dead of this world. I see the homeless and poor pushed out onto the margins of the city, people without adequate access to mental and physical healthcare. I see those whose real-life traumas and addictions have left them scarred, dangerous to themselves and others. To live in an urban environment is to see people in need of peace and healing.

We live in a world increasingly overcome with inner spiritual conflict, manifesting itself in outward conflicts of confusion, violence, and war. We too live in a world possessed by unclean

spirits. We describe our own inner conflicts with phrases like, “I’m of two minds about this. I feel conflicted.” “What came over me? I don’t know what possessed me to do that.” The inner conflicts of humanity can lead not only to confusion but to open violence and aggression.

I grew upon the north side of Chicago where there were plenty of people living out real-life traumas. As a young boy shortly after moving into the city, I remember walking to Lake Michigan near my father’s church with my parents and being frightened by the alcoholics and drug addicts wandering around Edgewater Beach. As a teenager, I remember a man who would walk around the neighborhood shaking his fist in the air in violent conversation with himself – running up to people and throwing a dollar bill on the ground in front of them, saying, “Money, what are you crazy?” Then he would pick it up and run away laughing.

One day during the pandemic, we were serving Soup Kitchen lunches outside, and I remember a man running across our church yard violently shouting, “I will kill you, just like I did to that other guy!” The voice was so violent, so unhinged, that I rushed out onto the patio balcony and shouted at the man to leave. No one knew who he was, and I have never seen him since.

This modern-day legion of voices is not only heard on the street; such voices are also heard among the powerful of this world. We are surrounded by a legion of voices shouting hate, exclusion, nationalism, and war. Every day the news outlets bring images of people living among the tombs, in cities reduced to rubble; images of people shackled by poverty, fear, and war. We hear a legion of voices calling for peace, yet we are conflicted because we have built economies that depend upon ongoing conflict. Conflicted voices say they want peace, and yet the bombing continues as if humanity can bomb its way to peace. We are powerless to silence the unclean spirits of nationalism and storms of hatred that seize nations, reducing people to living among the tombs.

The story of the Gerasene demoniac is not simply an ancient superstitious story, superseded by modern cool and enlightened scientific thinking. Our broken sinful behavior is at the center of this: we have used our reason and science not for peace, but to profit from violence and war. The story of the Gerasene demoniac is played out on our streets, in our national life, and among the nations of the world with a legion of voices conflicted over peace and war.

This story of Jesus restoring a man to his right mind is a story that needs to be heard again today, because we continue to push people and nations onto the margins. We hate others because of their nationality, religion, ethnicity, social background, gender and identity. A world of hate leads to madness among the nations, madness, madness...war.

It is against this background that Paul’s letter to the Galatians must be heard anew. For Paul, it is baptism into Christ that overcomes all barriers and boundaries dividing humanity. Paul tells the Galatians that as they have been clothed with Christ in baptism, they are made one in Christ. To be

clothed with Christ is to be like the Gerasene man found clothed and in his right mind. He was clothed with the grace and peace of Jesus, who ended his inner conflict, restoring his humanity.

In writing to the Galatians, Paul is describing the unclean spirits of this world – the national, political, and cultural ways we classify and separate humanity with expectations about how they and we are to behave. The power of class, complexion, and gender are the invisible chains and fetters by which we hold others captive and by which we too are held captive.

Like Jesus releasing a man from his fetters, Paul declares to the Galatians and to us, “*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*” Paul is describing the power of baptism that makes us new creations, no longer subject to the old ways, to the old order of creation. To be baptized means to live in a new way, to be a new creation. It means leaving behind the legion of voices telling us who we are, who others are, who to hate and exclude. Yet 2,000 years later, we continue to struggle with Jesus as the voice of sanity in a mad and maddening world.

To be in Christ is to live in peace for the peaceful well-being of this world; it is to be “a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). To be clothed with Christ is to know inner peace, sharing that peace with others. To be in Christ is to accept one another unconditionally as Christ has accepted us – so that in the church there are no longer distinctions among us – Jew or Greek, Asian or African; slave or free, poor or rich; male and female, gay and straight – all are made one in Christ Jesus.

Jesus crossed a small lake to give new life and inner peace to someone in need. Jesus continues to cross the world’s barriers and boundaries, not with bombs, but with peace that passes all understanding. Jesus transcends and mediates our differences, uniting us in himself.

In a divided world, the church’s mission – our mission – is to unconditionally welcome all people as Christ has welcomed us. To be a Christian is to be Christ’s voice for peace when the world cries out for war. To be a Christian is to welcome others with the arms of Christ. To be a Christian is to be clothed with Christ in baptism.

May your voice declare Jesus’ peace, welcome, and healing to all whom you meet.  
Declare how much Jesus has done for you – *All are one in Christ Jesus.* Amen.