

June 23 2013

Scripture Lesson ~

Psalm 42: 1-6a

Luke 8: 26-39

Sermon *A Crash in Pork Belly Futures*

I have a very dear friend who has seldom been afraid to try anything in life and over the years he has managed to inspire or even to trick me into doing things I might otherwise not do. In elementary school he got me on a motor cycle. The first time, he forgot to tell me the difference between the accelerator and the brake and I had a quite interesting crash into a pile of gravel. But it was OK, I had the experience. In Junior High we took our first train trip together from Spokane to Olympia without any planning. We ended up at the Olympia train station which is a shack out in the middle of nowhere. I had no idea how we were going to get into town but we made it. In college we took a road trip together in his Fiat Spyder all the way from Spokane down to San Diego, California and back again during spring break. We drove into a Fiat dealership had the car checked when we arrived home, the axle on the car broke in half. He not only tricked me but he had a charmed life, too. My friend has done the same kind of things where his finances have been concerned, too, including starting several companies, investing in 900 telephone numbers and investing the futures market. Now he tried to explain to me the futures market concept onetime and it never quite made sense to me. But I do remember chuckling at the fact that pork belly is still one of the chief commodities traded in the futures market. It sort of made me think of this story that we read from Luke's Gospel today which I call the crash in pork belly futures.

Bear with me. Jesus and his disciples had just, as we saw in this story which Rick had just read to us, crossed the Sea of Galilee into what was called the country of the Gerasenes. Probably a predominately Gentile region since because later on in this story there are pigs involved. The minute that Jesus steps off the boat he was confronted by a man who was thought to be possessed by demons. I think I have mentioned before that I have sort of wrestled with these demon stories. Demon possession is not something within the realm of my experiences and some commentators attributed this man's symptoms perhaps to epilepsy or perhaps mental illness but whatever the case, demons or illness might be the man was in a very bad way as we see demonstrated in the story. He was almost really as good as dead. He had no clothing to speak of, actually living in a grave yard, chained and under guard so not to hurt himself or others. Any productive life that he might

have lived was over and he was caught in a kind of hell on earth with nothing to look forward to but more of the same during the course of his life.

Jesus, however, wastes no time upon disembarking from his trip, he recognizes the situation and not about to let that situation continue and whatever evil is tormenting the poor man, Jesus wastes no time in confronting.

Commanding it to come out of the man and we see the command brings the man physically to his knees and has whatever it possesses him-demons or epilepsy, mental illness, begging Jesus to leave him alone. And then the operative word when Jesus asks them their name, they say Legion because of the great number and strength of what Jesus is confronting in this situation.

Now interestingly each time when Jesus speaks to Legion, it recognizes and hears Jesus. I am supposing first of all because Jesus has superior power over whatever this is and because in Scripture among the Israelites you know this as well as I anytime a name is asked for and given in this sort of context it means the one who has knowledge of the name, has power over whatever is named in the process. In fact that is why in several Old Testament stories including Moses and Burning Bush, God is very very careful of never to speak God's true name any mere human had any sort of power or authority over God.

And this is where the swine, this is where the pigs come in for it seems the Legion had some kind of death wish and rather than going into the into some sort of demon limbo or abyss Legion begs to be allowed to enter the herd of pigs. No doubt in the text the Jewish derogatory comment on pork which was unclean. Then the pigs stampede over a cliff and they drown. This then is where the stir in the story begins because rather than rejoice that this poor man has been restored to life, the local farmers fear the market for pork belly futures might collapse if Jesus stayed too much longer in their region. So they ask Jesus immediately to leave.

Now aside from the fact that this is one of the most fascinating stories in the New Testament why I wonder do you suppose it is placed here for us to read this morning? Why is it I wonder that there is a point for us to be made and what are we to learn from the story given to us today?

First, I think it is pretty clear that miracle stories are placed in the New Testament so we will understand who Jesus is. Understand what Jesus came to do. Understand that Jesus had the power to do all of these things but aside from that there is there is more specific understanding I think here. First of all, Jesus was not afraid to go and to help those who were much different from what he was. By people not very much appreciated by his fellow Jews and in this case Jesus was actually lowering himself to help Gentile people.

Secondly, Jesus never let any grass grow under his feet when it came to helping someone who was in the midst of pain. He was compassionate was too

great when he saw the dire need of this man and he could not pass up the opportunity to help in his time of need.

Third, Jesus is always equal to the task when it was to confront what is not right with the world around us whether that be sickness or whether that be evil or whether that be hopelessness or whether that be fear; Jesus has the power to be that strong presence in our lives who will walk with us through thick and thin in life.

And finally Jesus is not afraid to upset the status quo in order to follow God's will for his life and to help others and do the right thing in the process. In fact Jesus' priorities are always in line with what is truly important in life and that was demonstrated for us in this story today. Granted, business did suffer because of Jesus' actions but it is also true that a poor tormented man was restored to new life because of Jesus actions. Which I wonder was more important in the long run: a herd of pigs or the man's very heart and life and soul. I think that is the question that this passage leaves for us today. So before us, I think, a very important story for us to contemplate in our lives of faith. The story about overcoming fear and against prejudice in people we might not be familiar with. It is a story about compassion for other people. It is a story about faith and God's power to conquer all things. A story also, though about priorities and finally a story and a time in early 30 AD when the pork belly future market completely crashed. Together we say. AMEN