

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 21, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**SIXTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: When forces in the world threaten us,  
when our bodies or spirits turn against us,

All: **there is One who seeks us,  
One who meets us,  
One who heals us,  
whose love washes over us  
and sets us free for joy.**

One: This One is the Lord.

All: **So come, let us worship God.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** “Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above” GtG 645

1. **Sing praise to God who reigns above,  
the God of all creation,  
the God of power, the God of love,  
the God of our salvation.  
With healing balm my soul is filled,  
and every faithless murmur stilled:  
to God all praise and glory!**

2. **What God's almighty power hath made  
God's gracious mercy keepeth;  
by morning glow or evening shade  
God's watchful eye ne'er sleepeth.  
Within the kingdom of God's might,  
lo! all is just and all is right:  
to God all praise and glory!**

*(continued...)*

3. **The Lord is never far away,  
but, through all grief distressing,  
an ever present help and stay,  
our peace and joy and blessing,  
as with a mother's tender hand  
God gently leads the chosen band:  
to God all praise and glory!**

4. **Thus all my toilsome way along  
I sing aloud thy praises,  
that all may hear the grateful song  
my voice unwearied raises.  
Be joyful in the Lord, my heart;  
both soul and body, take your part:  
to God all praise and glory!**

Words: Johann Jacob Schutz, 1675; trans. Frances Elizabeth Cox, 1864, alt.  
Music: Bohemian Brethren's *Kirchengesang*, 1566; harm. Maurice F. Bell, 1906, alt.  
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#### **UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**God Most High,  
grant us faith to confess our sins  
and seek your mercy.  
There are barren places in our lives  
where we have wandered far from you.  
We have listened to voices  
who distracted us from your call.  
We have submitted to powers  
competing for our loyalty to you.  
Do not turn away from us,  
but forgive us, merciful and gracious God.  
Lead us out of the tombs we inhabit;  
guide us into your light.  
Feed us with your word;  
deliver us from evil.  
Help us hear and embrace the call to your kingdom;  
then send us out to serve you  
by the power of the Holy Spirit,  
in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

#### **SILENT CONFESSION**

## ASSURANCE OF PARDON and THE PEACE

One: Great is God's faithfulness!  
All: **With God there is forgiveness and great power to redeem.**  
One: God's mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.  
All: **God has turned our mourning to dancing,  
forgiving us fully and freely.**  
One: Our souls will not be silent.  
All: **As forgiven people, we will praise the Lord!**  
One: And share in the goodness and grace that we know in Christ Jesus.  
For in him we are forgiven. And may his peace be with you all.  
All: **And also with you.**

*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)*

## THE WORD

### SCRIPTURE READING Mark 5:1-20

MARK 5:1-20 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition+)

<sup>1</sup> They came to the other side of the lake, to the region of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup> And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. <sup>3</sup> He lived among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain, <sup>4</sup> for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. <sup>6</sup> When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him, <sup>7</sup> and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name do not torment me." <sup>8</sup> For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." <sup>10</sup> He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the region. <sup>11</sup> Now there on the hillside a large herd of pigs was feeding, <sup>12</sup> and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the pigs; let us enter them." <sup>13</sup> So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, stampeded down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned in the lake.

<sup>14</sup> Those tending the herd ran off and told it in the town and in the countryside. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. <sup>15</sup> When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. <sup>16</sup> Those who had seen what had happened to the man possessed by demons and to the pigs described it to them. <sup>17</sup> Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their region. <sup>18</sup> As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. <sup>19</sup> But Jesus would not

*let him and said to him, "Go home to your own people, and tell them all that the Lord, in mercy, has done for you." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.*

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** "Disturbing..." by Pastor Bill Vincent

This story is disturbing...in a 'legion' of ways.

Just this week I found out (unwittingly) that pigs can swim.

"You mean, those darn demons may not have really been done away with in that herd-ly stampede into the lake? They may have just swum further down the beach, resurfaced...and are still at-large in the world?"

The reformer Martin Luther, speaking of his struggle in life to be faithful to God, once said, "I tried to drown my demon, but the darn thing can swim."

I can't do it. I cannot rid myself fully of this 'demon' – whether you think of it as my own sinful inclinations, or external influences – I cannot fully rid myself of this demon that trips me up in my faithfulness and turns me in a different, unholy direction in life.

I cannot.

But, obviously, Jesus can. For in this story and its telling, the pigs – and spirits – were drowned.

But being faced with the limits of my power, my ability, my 'individualism' – "And did it my way!" – being faced with my limits in dealing with the demonic in life, and in my life...that's disturbing.

And yet...there is a source of power that can, and does, overwhelm the force, the influence that all too often overwhelms me.

Will I avail myself of that power? Will I turn toward it? ask for it? beseech it? even beg for it?

Which, in an odd twist, is what the Legion do: beg Jesus for a favor.

This story is disturbing.

And this man was disturbing, in his behavior and demeanor. So much so that the rest of the community didn't want much of anything to do with him. Maybe they had tried to help him, to restrain him and keep him from harming himself...and others. But after a while, and after numerous failed attempts, "What's the use? what's the point? Forget it!"...and forget him.

Maybe that's why he was shunned: because he was disturbing.

But he was also, obviously, himself disturbed: disturbed by this force, this influence that had him rip and tear at the world around him; this force, this influence that ripped and tore at him and his life and his humanity and his very being.

It's disturbing how the 'demonic' can truly turn the world upside down and change life, and change my life.

But it's also disturbing how we can become all too used to that. And we set up our barriers and arrange our life to make allowances for that demonic, evil, life-destroying work...and we simply carry on. Oh, it may be an inconvenience having someone ranting and raving and crying out amidst the tombs. But the graveyard is on the outskirts of town and I don't have to visit there very often, so I can just put it out of my mind and forget it for a while.

Until something – or someone – comes along and disrupts the balance we have established: that unholy balance with which we have become comfortable.

Disturbing to our life.

Yet healing for the man. Wholeness for him. *Shalom*. He is once again himself. As he was created to be. Finally, like Jesus in the previous story, the calm in the midst of the storm.

But this healing, and presence, of power – of Jesus – could even be healing for the community...if they had wanted it, if they had received what was offered to them, if they had received the man whom they once shunned, if they had received Jesus.

Like us, availing ourselves of this power we see in Jesus: Will we receive that offer of healing for our lives, and our way of life?

And, once again, this story is disturbing...and, quite honestly, disruptive.

For that balance we have arranged and with which we have become comfortable, and the livelihood we depend upon, is suddenly, and unexpectedly, disturbed and disrupted and thrown for a loop...and even thrown into the lake.

Who is this man who comes along and drowns our livelihood in the waters of the lake? Who takes our way of life and dismisses it with a word? And for what? For the life of one man? What about the rest of us?

We had life figured out! We had come to live with the inconvenience, maybe until it even seemed normal. We had established some semblance of order. And then he – this Jesus – throws it all aside!?

And what are the pigs – and herds – of our life with which we are so familiar and attached and dependent, that we treasure them more than the restoration and wholeness and life of another?

It is disturbing.

Yet, somehow, can we not see, also, it is freeing? The invitation to be disencumbered from all that clings to us and weighs us down, that shackles us...maybe even more than we have tried to shackle another?

But then there is one more disturbance...that we dislike, very much.

The man – now in his right mind, not his wrong one, mind you – begs to be with Jesus. And why wouldn't he? This Jesus has saved him from a terrible existence. This Jesus has restored him to his humanity. This Jesus has freed him from overwhelming, sinister forces; and freed him to be able even to make this request.

Every single one of us would have made the exact same request: "Let me be with you!"

And Jesus says, “No.”

Oddly enough, it is the one request Jesus refuses in this whole story.

The Legion of unholy spirits requests a destination of pigs. And Jesus says, “Sure.”

The countryside of unnerved neighbors requests Jesus’ destination be elsewhere. And Jesus says, “Okay.”

But the request of this man – this un-named man; this man who has experienced the healing power of Jesus’ word, who has come to know (intimately and personally) the freeing power of Jesus’ compassion, who now resides within the peace-filled power of Jesus’ presence – THIS man...Jesus refuses his request.

What?

It is disturbing.

Yet could it also be compelling?

For here, now, he has a focus, a purpose, a calling. A charge in life...and a charge *to* life.

To spread the good word, and the good name, of this one who turned my world upside down – or right side up, as the case may be – who re-righted my world, and my life...and my priorities and my way, and me. This one who re-directed my way toward life, and goodness, and caring, and compassion.

And to share the simple, yet profound – definitely profound – story of what this man, in his mercy, has done for me. Of all that he has done for me.

And *with* me. So, maybe he’s with me – and I am with him – after all.

To share that story of grace and goodness, life and new life, release and restoration.

To bear witness to it in our words, in our actions, in our choices and decisions, in our lives, in who we are.

And so, in the midst of the demonic voices crying from the graveyard of shattered relationships, we might speak a word of reconciliation and restoration.

So that when others choose to isolate the one possessed, we might go toward them, to embrace them in compassionate, healing community.

And when others storm off because the word they have heard from their Lord is not to their liking, we might give ourselves wholly, and whole-heartedly, to that very future graciously offered...even though it not be necessarily what we requested. But maybe we can live trusting that this Jesus knows what is best for us.

And we can do all that, because we ourselves have witnessed and experienced, been touched and changed by that disturbing – yet life-giving – man, Jesus.

\*HYMN "Silence! Frenzied, Unclean Spirit" GtG 181

1. "Silence! Frenzied, unclean spirit,"  
cried God's healing, Holy One.  
"Cease your ranting! Flesh can't bear it.  
Flee as night before the sun."  
At Christ's voice the demon trembled,  
from its victim madly rushed,  
while the crowd that was assembled  
stood in wonder, stunned, and hushed.
2. Lord, the demons still are thriving  
in the gray cells of the mind:  
tyrant voices, shrill and driving,  
twisted thoughts that grip and bind,  
doubts that stir the heart to panic,  
fears distorting reason's sight,  
guilt that makes our loving frantic,  
dreams that cloud the soul with fright.
3. Silence, Lord, the unclean spirit,  
in our mind and in our heart.  
Speak your word that when we hear it  
all our demons shall depart.  
Clear our thought and calm our feeling;  
still the fractured, warring soul.  
By the power of your healing  
make us faithful, true, and whole.

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\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH *(The Apostles' Creed)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.**

*(continued...)*

**On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*Today's translation of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission from Book of Common Worship, copyright 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.*

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**One:** Hear our prayer, O Lord...  
**All:** ...by your grace, in your mercy, with your power.

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER (Traditional)**

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
forever. Amen.**

### **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**With these gifts, O God,  
we remember with thanksgiving  
the life that we have because of you.  
Make us grateful every day  
for the privilege of offering ourselves  
for the well-being of all your world. Amen.**



## SENDING

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “We Cannot Measure How You Heal” GtG 797

1. We cannot measure how you heal  
or answer every sufferer’s prayer,  
yet we believe your grace responds  
where faith and doubt unite to care.  
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,  
survive to hold and heal and warn,  
to carry all through death to life  
and cradle children yet unborn.

2. The pain that will not go away,  
the guilt that clings from things long past,  
the fear of what the future holds,  
are present as if meant to last.  
But present too is love which tends  
the hurt we never hoped to find,  
the private agonies inside,  
the memories that haunt the mind.

3. So some have come who need your help  
and some have come to make amends,  
as hands which shaped and saved the world  
are present in the touch of friends.  
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here  
to mend the body, mind, and soul,  
to disentangle peace from pain,  
and make your broken people whole.

*Text by John L. Bell and Graham Maule.*

*Music: Scottish melody. Tune arrangement by John L. Bell. Copyright 1989,  
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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

All: ...Amen.

## POSTLUDE

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