

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Sixth Sunday of Pentecost/Ordinary Time – June 19, 2016 – Fathers' Day
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Luke 8:26-39

For Reflection

“Show me a sane man and I will cure him for you.”

— C.G. Jung (1875-1961) Swiss psychiatrist

“One person's craziness is another person's reality.”

— Tim Burton (b.1958) American film director/writer

Finding Our Right Minds

My 88-year-old father is taking piano lessons. His doctor told him that the best way to fight Parkinson's is to learn a new skill every six months – to replace the brain synapses that he's losing. His first skill – suggested by his wife – was to learn how to clean house. That went rather well. Six months later she bought him a keyboard. Now he's taking lessons with Peter's drum teacher – a rather talented musician on a number of instruments.

I sat in the studio coloring and listening to Dad play and sing a Pete Seeger song from the 1970's – Rainbow Race. By the second chorus I was weeping copiously:

One blue sky above us, one ocean lapping all our shores
One earth so green and round, who could ask for more
And because I love you I'll give it one more try
To show my rainbow race it's too soon to die

The song has history for us. I used to sing it with campers at Pilgrim Pines in the 1980's. Dad was a guest of the camp one week talking to high schoolers about the environment and the dangers of nuclear power. He sat to the side with tears on his face as 100 teenagers sang about G-d giving us one more chance to save planet Earth and each other. It's a song I'm likely to sing at his Celebration of Life someday – should something ever happen to him.

There will be a minimum of 50 celebrations of life in Orlando, Florida this month. I include the shooter in the count – as his family will also need to do some deep

remembering of the boy and man they loved – the person they believed him to be – that he probably was – until he went crazy. It is tragically ironic that – more than radicalization by ISIS and the other groups he claimed affinity with – some of whom are fierce competitors – he was most likely made crazy by his father’s open hatred of his son’s closeted sexual orientation – made crazy by his own self-hatred – made crazy by our current hyper-pseudo-Christian, frenzied, homophobic culture lashing back at recent strides made in the social acceptance of “gay marriage” and the rights of transgender human beings to exist.

Anyone in their right mind would NOT do what he did. But there is a lot of insanity right now – masquerading as moral certitude, religious self-righteousness and reactive political positioning. There are a lot of people with bully pulpits and access to social media who are not in their right minds – jamming the air waves with their racist vitriol and heat-seeking lies, phobias and misogyny, incitement to hatred, gun-grabbing and violence.

Without the guidance of parents and pastors and mentors and media with common sense – without some serious filtering out of these poisons – through lenses of reason and compassion – any young American today could grow up believing this *stuff*. We need our “fathers” now more than any other Fathers’ Day in our lifetimes: fathers in their right minds bringing up kids with gentleness – steeped in G-d’s love – disciplined by an ethic of non-violence and common goodness – singing songs about this Rainbow Race called Human Kind.

And I believe this is what Jesus was saying to his people 2000 years ago – in a time when they needed fathers in their right minds to get them through tough times of cultural insanity – a society crushed under Roman military rule and manipulative cultural and religious laws aimed at shoring up a vicious class system.

The story we read this morning had some code language in it that indicates it was about much more than an exorcism of an individual. Keep in mind that we have an oral tradition written down by a variety of authors in different contexts. So there are some contradictions to sort out.

Our story appears in three Gospels Mark and Luke say Jesus sailed to “the country of the Gerasenes” – aka Gerasa – which was east of the Jordan River – but south of the Sea of Galilee. In Matthew he sailed to “the country of the Gadarenes” – aka Gadara –

which was directly east of the Sea of Galilee. This is the only one he could have sailed to – so let's go with Gadara.

<http://debunkingchristianity.blogspot.com/2012/07/biblical-contradictions-and-christian.html>

Gadara – the land east of Galilee was populated by Gentiles aka non-Jews. So our first clue that Jesus is doing something unusual is that he and his gang are intentionally travelling to Gentile territory.

They encounter a (most likely Gentile) NAKED man (indicating something is not right) who lives in the CEMETERY among the dead – meaning he is perpetually unclean according to Jewish law. And he is occupied – OCCUPIED by demons – that go by the name of LEGION. In the Roman army a legion is 6000 soldiers. So if we take a hint – the man represents territory occupied by a Roman legion.

The author, known to us as Luke, wrote this in the last third of the first century. Churches had both Jewish and Gentile membership. And there are references to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70 c.e. Keeping this in mind, Luke describes a hierarchy in this story that places Jesus – Son of the Most High G-d – above Legion.

As soon as Jesus arrives Legion is BEGGING for mercy – terrified of being sent to the ABYSS which (according to Revelation 20:3) is the final prison of Satan and all things evil. Jesus “gives them permission” to occupy a nearby herd of swine (animals already considered to be unclean). And the pigs – being very smart creatures – commit suicide to rid themselves of Roman occupation.

The crazy man – once occupied territory – is then seen by his fellow citizens clothed and “in his right mind” – sitting at the feet of Jesus. And the “Christian” audience understands that Jesus – not the Roman legion – is the true ruler of both Jewish and Gentile territory – the true ruler of not just their hearts but of their countries. And they will not be in their right minds until they throw off this pestilence, this unclean, “soiled, filthy, base, unchaste, sinful, corrupt, polluted”, poisonous political presence.

The poison of armed hatred raised its ugly head in England this week, taking the life of Jo Cox, 41-year-old member of parliament and mother of two. Her husband issued a statement saying, “Hate doesn't have a creed, race or religion, it is poisonous.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/17/world/europe/jo-cox-british-mp.html>

Also this week rainbow posters appeared all over West Hollywood with the pro-gun message #shoot back. The response of residents was to tear down the posters and declare themselves on the side of LOVE.

<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-weho-shootback-rainbow-20160616-snap-story.html>

We have to find our way back to our right minds. We have to crawl our way out of this poisonous ocean of hatred. We need to be the fathers and mothers and mentors our children desperately need – teaching them kindness and unconditional love and the strength of conviction in the face of hate.

One blue sky above us, one ocean lapping all our shores
One earth so green and round, who could ask for more
And because I love you I'll give it one more try
To show my rainbow race it's too soon to die

Scripture Reading for Sunday June 19, 2016 – Pentecost 6 – Year C

Luke 8:26-39

26 Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

27 As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"-- 29 for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) 30 Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. 31 They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

32 Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33 Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. 34 When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country.

35 Then 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**. And they were afraid. 36 Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. 37 Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Matthew 8:28

23 And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. 24 A gale arose on the lake, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. 25 And they went and woke him up, saying, 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' 26 And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. 27 They were amazed, saying, 'What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?'

28 When he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demoniacs coming out of the tombs met him. They were so fierce that no one could pass that way. 29 Suddenly they shouted, 'What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?' 30 Now a large herd of swine was feeding at some distance from them. 31 The demons begged him, 'If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.' 32 And he said to them, 'Go!' So they came out and entered the swine; and suddenly, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and perished in the water. 33 The swineherds ran off and, on going into the town, they told the whole story about what had happened to the demoniacs. 34 Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighbourhood.

Furthermore, if you look at the map, only Gadara qualifies as making any sense with the accounts. You cannot sail to the Gerasenes country.

<http://debunkingchristianity.blogspot.com/2012/07/biblical-contradictions-and-christian.html>

It was on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and must have been a locality where the steep edges of the Bashan plateau drop close upon the brink of the lake.

<http://biblehub.com/topical/g/gerasenes.htm>