

## **On the Outskirts** **Pentecost 4 - 20<sup>th</sup> June 2010**

***Readings:***

**Luke 8: 26-39**

**Lord Jesus, you are the Lord of life, master of the waves and the sea, the great healer of the sick, raiser of the dead, enemy of demons, friend of the outcast and enslaved. Inspire us with renewed confidence in your power over the world. Show us your presence wherever your kingdom breaks out and evil slinks away in defeat. Equip us with the gifts we need, to be part of your saving healing work. Move us out beyond the safe confines of our church, out into the world to join you in your saving work. Lord Jesus, help us to enact, to prove, to witness to your reign in all our lives. AMEN.**

Well don't you all look good this morning. All here dressed in your Sunday best! Well some of you have made the effort! But perhaps it's a good thing that we don't have a Sunday morning fashion competition any more. We arrive at church these days in clothes that are comfortable. No ties, no hats, no gloves not even any corsets, or is that a presumption on my part.

But as you went to your closet this morning to pick out a Sunday outfit, I want to know if any of you here had any skeletons in those closets. You know those things that have happened in your lives or the lives of family members that you'd rather not have anyone know about. I don't really want you tell us all here and now, but I'd be very surprised if there weren't a few skeletons rattling around out there this morning. We all have them. I know I have. We get embarrassed so we hide them away. It so human for us to put things that disturb us, things we are we're not too proud about, to put them to one side to place them to the back of the closets, the back blocks of our lives. We do it all the time.

And our society does it all the time. Society is very reluctant to look at its skeletons. In my previous life as a social worker, working for the dreaded welfare, I used to visit Aboriginal Missions, in country NSW and I never had any trouble finding them. They were always on the outskirts. On the back blocks of town where people did not have to be confronted with their condition. That's also why prisons are often in remote places, making it hard for family to visit. Look where Ashley is!

It was also the reason for the large orphanages and mental hospitals built during the 19th Century were always on the outskirts of town. Lets not have the poor unfortunates too close.

And at a time when refugees - boat people have reared their unwanted heads again, it's also why our government brought out of mothballs Port Hedland Detention Centre - 60 kilometres from the nearest town, Derby! Almost as remote as Christmas Island, both the remote outskirts so that we are not upset by seeing the distress and misery of the detainees. We must be protected!

And don't try and bring these sorts of people that are best left outside into our own neighbourhood. I remember in one country town the trouble we had when we tried to set up a Family Group Home for youngsters in care, in a suburban street so that we could normalize these youngsters lives. And I won't bore you with the fight we had trying to set up a Youth Refuge in that same town. Not in my backyard thank you. I might have to do something about the problem.

That's why this story of Jesus and the Garesene demoniac is so interesting. Jesus is out in the back blocks. He's in Gentile country, out on the fringe, and even in that place there is an even more remote place where the unwanted are consigned. In this case it's a demon possessed man who has to be chained for the safety of the community and for his own safety perhaps. And his allotted place - the cemetery. His neighbours it would appear to have named him "Legion" because his personality is fragmented into many parts. His neighbours have learned to live with the dehumanisation of the man they call Legion. Nowadays we make TV shows about the problem - The United States of Tara! And Jesus comes and spoils it all. He doesn't ignore the raving lunatic, as many would have. He engages, he talks with Legion.

This is a strange story. A strange story set in shadowy, confused, strange sort of place, the sort of place in which we rather secure, sensible church people don't like to go. Yet it is here that Jesus comes, it is here that Jesus exorcises and makes the madman whole.

Now I don't know what Jesus had against the pigs, for when the demons seek to escape Jesus, they ask to be sent into the pigs. Perhaps the demons thought they would be safe from Jesus, because Jesus was a good Jew. Perhaps the story of the pigs behaving like lemmings is to emphasise the absolute power that Jesus has over evil, for the pigs together with the Legion are destroyed. And all that remains for the Garesenes townsfolk to see when they finally come out to see what's been going on is, the man minus the chains, clothed, and in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus.

It a miracle! It's a miracle! - You'd think! But no the Garesene pork producers protest. They have suffered grave economic loss in all this.

If it was today - they'd sue! Compensation please! So they tell Jesus to be on his way, for they were seized with great fear.

Darkness comes in many forms. More often than not there is an economic dimension to our social sicknesses. Look at our accommodation of the gambling industry because it brings the state revenue. Look at how long we have taken to put a curb on the Tobacco industry, because it brings the state revenue. Healing is OK as long as it doesn't affect business. And in this country never take on multi-billion dollar miners!

Darkness, possession, enslavement comes in many forms. One consists of the demons that torment the soul of the poor man. Yet there is another darkness that consists of enslavement to our economic masters.

But this reaction of the forces of darkness ought not distract us from the light, from the joy of this story. A once tormented man is free.

He praises Jesus and is sent home - I assume to a home not in the cemetery on the outskirts, but in the town amongst his neighbours, as a permanent reminder to them of the power of God through Jesus Christ. A permanent reminder that Jesus is to be found on the outskirts, always seeking to heal.

Now this is good news even for us today. Sometimes we can be possessed, possessed by our own individual demons, that isolate us from our neighbours. The good news in Jesus Christ is that there is no place where Jesus will not go to heal us. That's our Good News to share. Jesus who will go anywhere to heal us, body, mind and soul.

And for our church, Pilgrim, that seeks to be the body of Christ on earth, there should be no place that we will not go to bring the healing touch of Jesus.

What does that mean for us? Who are the legions of today sitting in their own little cemeteries, shunned by their neighbours. Are they the asylum seekers that are locked away in detentions centre? Are they prisoners locked away prisons only a few kilometres from here? Are they neighbours only next door but so lonely in their minds they are alone, miles from anywhere, on the outskirts. Or are they perhaps even some of us when we feel at the bottom of a great hole lost to everyone? Well these are the byways that Jesus treads, the byways that we as his disciples are called to tread, even today, seeking to heal and free all those who are tormented by the many demons that assail our time and our society.

There is no region immune from the Christ's power. Christ does not forsake, but seeks out those who are imprisoned, those out on the fringe. Christ works on the edge of our secure world, reaching out to those who have been pushed to the edge. The Christ is there at the back of the closets of our lives where we hang our skeletons to bring light and healing. The Christ is light to our darkness,

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