

Today we return to the Gospel of Luke after several weeks with John. Today's gospel story, which is noted in all three of the synoptics, follows immediately after the story of Jesus calming the seas from the storm that had frightened the disciples so much, they woke Jesus from a deep sleep in fear, and after he had calmed the gale winds they continued to be in awe and wonder, questioning who this Jesus was who commands even the winds and the waters.

Jesus is immediately confronted after stepping from the boat with a man who was possessed with demons. Luke clearly details that this man had suffered so much that was often not wearing clothing, shackled, had been separated from his family and community, and lived in the tombs...or caves. He was afraid of Jesus, concerned that he would be tormented. He shares with Jesus that he had been possessed with many demons, he describes them as legion. Jesus orders the demons to leave the man. The demons also in fear of Jesus, asked permission, and then entered into a herd of pigs, who ran off of the cliff and drowned.

The community when they heard they story were afraid, so much so they asked Jesus to leave... the man Jesus had healed begged to stay with Jesus, but Jesus instructed him to return to his home, share his story of what God has done for him.

Ok, we all know this is the script for dozens of sci-fi fantasy horror movies.... you know those stories with the creepy music, that creates a level of fear that keeps you on the edge of your seat. This passage, needless to say, is all about fear.

What we can understand from this Gospel is that the people were afraid. They were more afraid of Jesus, and his power to heal the possessed man and to calm the storm, than the demons or possessed man himself, they did not appear to be surprised of losing their livestock, probably a common problem of getting lost or stolen by the occupying Roman Empire, dying to famine, or disease.

We might ask, of the people in this story and of ourselves, do we fear trusting in God more than the demons we face daily.

All of us at some level are plagued with fears at times in our lives...fears for our health, fears of aging and memory loss, fears of safety for our families and children,

fears of gun violence in our churches, fears of a civil insurrection, fears for the future of the human race. I do believe that there are demons to fear. There are individuals, ideas, that deep down we would rather keep separated from us...in prisons, or shackles and under guard to be sure, but also more subtly in other neighborhoods, states, or regions of the country. I confess, I am fearful of Florida, the deep south, and frankly stay away.

It is fair to ask ourselves, who is in control really? The agencies that keep demons in prisons and shackles, the possessed who hide on the fringes of our society...depending on our perspective they might be homeless, immigrants, other tribes, languages, or races, or white supremacist?

There are also the demons that we might describe as the challenges we face that prevent us from becoming what God is calling us to be and to do as cocreators of God's peaceful reign of heaven. Certainly, we are confronted with perhaps even possessed by mental illness, addictions, destructive habits, anxiety, and lethargy.

This Gospel, and the multitude of healing stories in the Gospels, is about the power of trust and faith in God. In a couple of weeks, we will hear in Luke the sending of

the 70, who returned and shared with Jesus in amazement that they too in Jesus' name were able to cast out demons. Their formation has come a long way from being afraid in the stormy sea and the power of Jesus over the winds and waves to casting out demons.

In today's Gospel the demented man has been healed, the legions of demons have been cast out, and he has been made whole. Further, he has been saved...restored, he became not only a follower of Jesus but also proclaimed his story to his community.

Consider my paraphrase of the first three steps in the 12 step program of AA.

Consider these a prayerful plan to challenge our own fears and demons .

1. We admit, recognize that we are totally powerless over our demons, fears, addictions.. and that the world around us is out of control and unmanageable.
2. We commit to believe, to trust, that a power greater than ourselves, either personally or communally, could assist in bringing or restoring order, peace, sanity to ourselves, our families, and our communities.

3. We make a personal decision, each and every day, to follow the Way of Jesus, The Way of Love, and trust our lives to the care and stewardship of God, as we understand God to be.

I would be the last person to suggest this is easy...certainly it is not for me. It is clearly, one day at a time. I love the Sufi saying, praise Allah without ceasing, but tie your Camel to a Post, and I have gotten really proficient at tying knots.

I want to be able to end gun violence, to protect immigrants, dismantle racism, to save the planet...my ego, my demon if you will, gives me the false sense that I might have some influence to make that happen with help from others.

Nevertheless, I understand deeply, I trust that the response in our baptismal covenant, I will with God's help is without doubt, a foundational truth.

Jesus brings to this story a confrontation with power, the power of demonic possession, the power of fear. The people of Jesus, the disciples, are becoming a movement for liberation. They are beginning to understand that Jesus can calm a storm, walk on water, heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons.

Luke is suggesting perhaps that the demon in the center of the room is fear, the fear of naming our demons, the fear of a relationship with the divine.... the fear of an outsider, the fear of trusting a power greater than ourselves.

We can make a decision each and every day, one day at a time, to confront our fears with God's help, to Follow the way of love, and trust our lives to the love and care of The Holy One, Creator, Word, and Wisdom. Make it so. Amen.