

#32 15-16

Psalm 22:19-28

Isaiah 65:1-9

Galatians 3:23-29

\*Luke 8:26-39

## Where Do We Go From Here?

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 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. 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" — 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.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. 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. 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. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 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. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. 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. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "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. *This is the Word of The Lord . . .*

Well, I don't know about all of you, but true confessions, this has been a rough week for me. I am so grateful that last Sunday we did not know before or during worship about the Orlando massacre. It seemed to me that the memory of last week's service, was such a great comfort when I returned home and heard about the shooting in "The Pulse". People who gathered in what they thought was a safe place to dance and experience carefree joy, and it became a place of horror and pain.

In this last week I have been helping and being helped by others in sorting through the emotions which have swooped over us all in various forms. Sadness, shock, anger, frustration, worry . . . are just a few of the emotions which I have had to deal with, within myself and with others. Suddenly every LGBTQ person I know and love was in danger and I wanted to be with them and repeat over and over that I loved them . . . Wanting in some way to make up for the pain that they feel, because each and every one of them has experienced cruelty because of who they love at one time or another ~ and to be objects of mass murder touches them in ways we who are straight, may never know. Vigils and speeches and articles and information about the murderer are filling our lives as we try to understand how this is going to affect us all now . . . especially during an election year. This is a very heavy time in the life of a US American citizen.

And I am grateful for our Psalm from today . . . "19But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid! . . . 20Deliver my soul from the sword . . . All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! . . . 24For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him. . . . 25From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. . . . 27All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. . . . 28For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations." It begins with the ache and the pain that I think we can all relate to . . . the stabbing pain of a shock - the need to feel rescued! And the chants of the trust we have in God . . . the reminders of those times when we knew God was Great . . . and the resolve into the statement of fact . . . the resolve . . . God is good, we belong to God, and all will be well . . . from panic to acceptance in tone psalm. It may take us a little more time, but the Psalm is still true! We will know the praise and glory and awe of God in time, if not already!

Clarity does come, direction and empowerment does come, and trusting and praising God during our discomfort is our right and our gift. Chanting to ourselves that we can trust God does remind us whose we are!

Another bit of rough spot for me, personally, this week was the New Beginnings information given to us by Annell, Friday and yesterday. Rough because it is the beginning of something new, a challenge and a calling for us. And there is

a pressure, because we know, and have known for some time, that we who are caretakers of this beloved, historic church, are facing the chance of facing the end of the life of this Body of Christ as we know it, or we can be a part of a change and a New Life. And we wonder, do we have the stuff? Can we work the process well? And the fear that we have from not having or being enough can make us anxious, wanting to cry, "O Lord! Help! Come quickly to our aid!"

The same questions I had when I wrote the letter about Orlando can pertain to us . . . How do we obey Christ when he commands us not to worry, when we are left overwhelmed by the (potential) loss and the pain? How can we trust promises in the Bible which tell us that love is greater than fear and Christ has overcome the world of trouble? For we could get overwhelmed with worry and want to jump to fix things fast according to our limited knowledge.

There was some misinformation - it was thought that everyone would have access to the assessment, but the fact is, what we have before us is a process, and we are being asked to trust the process. Pierrette, Debbie Blair, and Hugh are the leaders of the 3 house groups. There will be 6 meetings in each group and in the environment of those meetings the information will be shared, and discussed in a productive matter. We have been asked that those who have received the assessment not share them with the others yet, because outside of the controlled group sessions we could wander and become overwhelmed. We are being asked to trust. Trust the process. Trust the house group leaders. Trust each other. But I am here to tell you emphatically . . . that we CAN trust all of this and mostly - we can trust God! God who is the inspiration for all the houses of worship on this planet will not overlook us! God is with us and will continue to with us as we go through this process.

We have an amazing history in this church of overcoming rough spots. We are filled to the brim with compassionate, intelligent people who have so much to offer - and that is just the stuff we know about! I venture to say that we will discover some talents and gifts within ourselves and each other that we did not know about.

I know that we have reasons to be concerned, but if we could but trust in the God, whom we worship through the Mystical, Miraculous Holy Spirit of Christ, and look at each other - see the wonder that we feel about each other? Aren't we in awe of each other at times? I could list off the gifts each of you have and why you are so wonderful - and you could probably do the same.

Our problems often come when we look within ourselves. We can see how wonderful others are - but can we see ourselves as others here see us? That is why one of the most challenging parts of this New Beginnings process may be trusting ourselves. God - YES! Others - sure! Ourselves . . . maybe not so much . . .

This is when our Epistle reading can help . . . :

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

And we all know what happened to Abraham's offspring - He was given you more descendants than can be counted and was the father of many nations!"

Now, I am not suggesting that by the end of this process we will have to add on floors and extensions to this building . . . but what I can easily envision is that we will have a new invigorating clarity as to who we can minister to, how we can minister to them, and what we need to do, to best serve them. And that will bring this church true joy, and enthusiasm - but best of all, we will KNOW that God was with us! We will KNOW the inspiration and trust of God! We will know that it was Christ that freed us from our fear and hopelessness and lethargy and we will "Return to [our homes], and declare how much God has done for [us]." Just as the man in our gospel reading had done.

This is actually an exciting time for us here - we are embarking on something new, let us trust the process of Hope Partnership, each other, ourselves, and the glorious God who care for us so much! IN Christ's name we pray! AMEN!