



Grain

“The only difference between a rut and a grave are the dimensions.”

–Ellen Glasgow

Field

²⁶Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷As 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. ²⁸When 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”— ²⁹for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man... ³³Then 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. ³⁴When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then 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. Luke 8:26-29; -33-35

Thoughts by Rev. Peter Heide, United in Christ Lutheran Church, Morrisonville, Wisconsin

In this week’s text we read about a man possessed by demons. Today we know much more about mental disease and disorders. No longer is demon possession a diagnosis for people. There are many successful treatment regimens for those who live with mental illness, but this man in the Gospel has no treatment program. Because of his illness, he no longer lives at home; he lives among the dead (in tombs); one of the homeless.

His relatives and neighbors are afraid of him, so they guard him—shackle and bind him with chains and ropes. In many ways, the treatment of people with mental illness today is often not much better. Luke explains how when Jesus takes the time to listen to this man, to know his name, and sits with him, an amazing gift of wholeness comes to him. The result of receiving this wholeness is this same man is able to return to his home and bear witness to God’s activity in his life.

Many Roman images—the name, legion; pigs; and the boar of Ares emblazoned on Roman unit shields—are included in the details of this passage. Amid the imperial military oppression they provoke, is the story of God’s people living in despair among the dead, looking back at what had been and not seeing their way into a hope-filled future.

It is not difficult to see our own congregations in the context of this story. We live in a world of division, despairing, not knowing how to resolve the issues. It is easy then to recall what may have been a more prosperous and seemingly peaceful time in the past. This may result in a type of communal psychosis. We rampage among the dead hoping to find new life. We find ourselves shackled and fettered to an emptiness we cannot fill—tombs that only hold death.

Into this time of emptiness and despair, Jesus comes and points us in ways of service to others instead of personal raging. We are given a new name, beloved of God. We are clothed in Christ’s righteousness and justified by Christ’s work for us. In the presence of the risen Christ, God shows us the way forward, giving us wholeness and peace, and sends us to our homes and to our neighbors to tell the story of what God is doing in and among us today. Happy Monday!

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Many blessings upon you,
Pastor Peter