

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Year C - 19/6/2016

1 Kings 19:1-15  
Psalm 42;43  
Galatians 3:10-14,23-29  
Luke 8:26-39

**In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...**

It seems that if there is one thing we all know something about it is *authority*. At various different times in our lives we are all subject to different authority. In our childhood we usually live under the authority of our parents, to one degree or another, and as we go through school we understand that teachers have authority over us, also. As we mature, we also begin to realize more about the legal authority under which our society functions, and may think more or less of that as we hone our critical thought.

It is probably the dream of most children in their early teenage years that, one day, there will come a time when they can “do whatever they like”; when they can break the shackles of their parents and household rules, get out there into the world, and live the way they want to. I know that I certainly had those thoughts at that age. I thought, somewhat naively as it turned out, that once I turned 18 everything would just change. There I would be, finally able to vote, to drink legally, to be an adult; surely that would be the time when I could start making all the decisions for myself and I would be a happy boy!

Well, of course, as you might imagine, that wasn't the case - the reality of having to function in a world where we are answerable to many different people at different levels was a shock to me, and it took a significant change in life circumstances, when I began my nursing training to make me grow up a little more and understand something about my place in the world.

In Luke's Gospel, from where our Gospel passages are taken currently, Jesus is moving around the Judean countryside, with his disciples.

Today he finds himself in the Gentile area, the Gerasene region, and we have a vivid narrative full of powerful conflicts, transformations, rejections, and resolutions.

Straight away the reader encounters the conflict of authority between Jesus and the demons. This is a recurring theme of this part of the Gospel; this being the second of four vignettes in which Jesus' authority is displayed (calming the storm, exorcizing the demons, healing the woman with the hemorrhages, and raising Jairus's daughter), culminating in his delegating authority to the Twelve as they begin their mission. Despite their vast number, the demons here are no match for Jesus. They fall before him and beg that he not send them back to the abyss. Their end comes, rather peculiarly, by being cast into a herd of swine and drowned.

We cannot miss here the element of conflict. At the command from Jesus that the unclean spirit leave, the demon-speaking man replies, "Do not torment me". He rightly perceives Jesus as a menace who will engage destructive forces and destroy them. It is the nature of Jesus' authority that he threatens inhumane and oppressive powers, sometimes directly, sometimes subversively. Not every individual or institution is ready for the overhaul that Jesus always brings.

The authority of Jesus effects an amazing transformation from terror to wholeness. The details of the "before" and "after" are stunning. Once naked, banished from the city, living in the caves, convulsive, kept unsuccessfully under guard, totally uncontrollable, he becomes a disciple of Jesus, sane and appropriately clothed. The Greek word translated "in his right mind" is the same characteristic Paul urges for all Christians ("sober judgment," Rom. 12:3). It is hard to imagine a more complete picture of transformation than that which is painted in the narrative itself.

Is this transformation possible also in our lives? Is this the message of today? And if it is, how are we to gain such a promise?

The first point is our recognition of God as the ultimate authority in our lives. We recognize and understand the scope and breadth of God's authority, worked through in the person of Jesus. In the expelling of the demons today we gain an insight into God's power over the realms of darkness; of illness; and shortly in the Gospel, over even death itself.

The second point flows from this. As we begin to understand this, it is clear that we are to submit ourselves; our lives to this power. Moreover, in so doing we are to grasp that apart from this authority and this power we are unable to achieve anything of worth. That it is only through this power of God in our lives that we have the courage to step out, and the gifts to succeed in our calling.

Because each of us is called to be the man or woman that God created us to be; this is our goal in life, nothing more, nothing less. Our life journey, with its twists and turns, its challenges and joys, and its surprises and heartaches is simply a journey of discovery; the jewel we try to discover is that person we were created and called to become.

You may think this is all just pie-in-the-sky stuff that I am talking about; Sam's got his head in the clouds again!! Well, just listen again to the words we heard from Paul's letter to the Galatians. "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith", he says. He is reminding the people of Galatia of my very point; each of us belong to God because we were created by God. But Paul goes further, and it is this next phrase which I believe gives us the strongest indication as to the potential future if we understand God's authority and call on our lives.

Paul says "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". What a vision Paul has for humanity; no distinctions made, between race, between class, between sexes.

Unfortunately the tragic events of this week remind us just how very far away we are in reality from this vision, and in a way I am reminded in my own sadness regarding the tragedy of Orlando of the words of the demoniac - "Do not torment me". So often, the actions of people flow from their fear - their fear of what they do not understand; of what they have been wrongly taught; of what they hope to overwhelm with violence. As Leunig so succinctly points out, the opposite of love is not, as we might think, hatred, but rather the opposite of love is fear.

Fear can paralyze us; fear can make us impotent; fear can cause us to do unspeakable things. But Paul reminds us today that we have no need to fear. He points to the new creation that is within each one of us through the reconciling love of God through Christ Jesus, and challenges us: if we submit our lives to the authority of God and live out of that blessing, then it can truly be possible to live with no fear, to make no distinctions.

Jesus says to the man from whom the demons had gone, "return to your home and declare how much God has done for you." Let us all, by our words, our actions, and our lives, tell of what God has done for us and work in the power of God to transform our lives and the lives of those around us.

Amen.