

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Dan Haylett. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church - pray for them as they pray for you.

Opening Prayer

O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.

For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also.

The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land.

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.

For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

(Psalm 95)

Hymn: STF 65 Sing of the Lord's goodness.

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLMDEN8Y5f0>

Sing of the Lord's goodness,
Father of all wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us,
his love is for ever,
faithful to the end of days.

Come, then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.

Power he has wielded, honour is his garment,
risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken,
one bread he has broken,
new life he now gives to all.

Come, then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,

melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.

Courage in our darkness,
comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
solace for the weary,
pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the living God.

Come, then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.

Praise him with your singing,
praise him with the trumpet,
praise God with the lute and harp;
praise him with the cymbals,
praise him with your dancing,
praise God till the end of days.

Come, then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.

Ernest Sands (b. 1949)

Let us pray together

With all that we are, we praise you, O God. You are goodness beyond measure, mercy without end. To you, we bring our love and worship.

You are the power and grace behind all that we are, and see, and do. To you, we bring our grateful hearts.

You are the comfort, the hope, the peace we need. To you, we sing out our praise.

Holy God, Creator, Redeemer and Faithful friend, we offer our worship.

We confess that we do not always find ways to sing of your goodness, or reflect your love in action in our world.

We confess that we have turned from you and from our neighbour in their need.

We seek your forgiveness and to hear the call of Christ, inviting us to be made whole and renewed for mission and service.

Lord Jesus, let your forgiveness take root in our lives, churches and the world. Let our song of praise rise to you again.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Today's Gospel Reading – Luke 8: 26 – 39

26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. 27 When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” 29 For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

30 Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him.

31 And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. 33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, 35 and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. 37 Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Time to Reflect

It’s always instructive to read around the text that is before us. When we read this story in context, as it is presented as part of

Luke's accounts of Jesus' travelling tales and healings, we find our understanding deepened.

In the passage just before this story of Jesus meeting "Legion" we read about Jesus crossing over the sea of Galilee with his disciples, and his needing to wake up to calm a great storm that threatened to overwhelm them. This isn't just an action packed account of a commute as Jesus comes into the gentile territory of the Gerasenes, but its an indication of what he is up to; what he is always up to. Jesus calms the storm, showing command over the raging forces of nature threatening to sink frightened disciples.

Now, arriving in land thought of as "unclean" Jesus meets a demon possessed man who is also considered "unclean" on just about every social indicator in use. Jesus shows us again what he is up to, what he is always up to.

There's a wonderful irony in the story that is all too recognisably true for us, that when transformation happens and the man is freed from the demons that have caused him and the locals such trouble and pain, it is Jesus who is asked to leave. Jesus, doing what he does, causes all sorts of things to change and for people to take notice.

Then, bookending this account, Luke tells us that Jesus again crosses over the lake. It's a sub-plot, but these crossings are

significant, for people believed that these boundary places (akin to our "no-man's land") were where demons were thought specifically to dwell. These crossing over places were to be avoided and thought of as dangerous, and unclean. Jesus crosses these boundaries and confronts, head on, the demons and troubles that he meets.

Back on home territory Jesus is met by Jairus, a leader in the Synagogue, who comes pleading for his daughter's life to be saved. On route to her Jesus heals a woman who has reached out to him from the crowds, and then brings life to Jairus' daughter who had by this time died. In showing up, Jesus does what he does, and lives are renewed, wholeness is found and the world is shaken!

These consecutive accounts, all from Luke 8, help us to understand what Jesus is up to then, and now. You can trace the common threads of God's healing and wholeness running through these accounts: Jesus notices, Jesus goes where others fear or scruple to tread, Jesus subverts the expectations around him, Jesus empowers women and men and children to tell their own story of what he has done, Jesus acts decisively and with compassion. This is what Jesus does, then and now.

It seems to me that in these texts we actually find a sophisticated theological understanding of the forces and

powers that we need to be relieved from. We can be embarrassed and shy away from simplistic interpretations of demon possession today, and yet we are misguided in discounting or denying the presence and effect of evil upon and within us. We read in these New Testament texts a nuanced understanding however, that is profoundly helpful. Not only is “Legion” battling his inner demons, but Luke is clearly referencing the social evil of, in this case, Roman occupation.

If Jesus’ healing encounter is liberating for “Legion”, it challenges those who have adopted customs and practices that have led to separation and division within the community and within the people’s relationship with God. Jesus actions and words point to his understanding of wholeness and liberation from evil being both individual and social. “Social holiness” might well be a good Wesleyan shorthand definition of what is going on and being offered here.

Taken together, these stories of healing, wholeness and liberation, set the work of God within us in a glorious context. We learn that working for justice and for the good of all creation is part of Jesus’ healing ministry, just as much as freeing someone from their own inner demons. There is no hierarchy in what Jesus comes to do and does among us.

The reality in these encounters is that the healing leads to change and transformation. “Legion” wanted to stay with Jesus, but is sent to go to those who used to run from him to tell them what Jesus has done for him. He’s now got a mission and purpose, a reason to live.

Have we found ways to accept the fullness of what God intends for us and those around us? Have we understood that Jesus doing what Jesus does might change our lives? Have we found the courage to tell what he has done for us?

A time of prayer

Take time in prayer to recall just how much the Lord has done for you. Take time to let gratitude infuse your praying and silence before God.

Lord God, we bring our thanks to you. You come to us in love, in Jesus Christ, bringing freedom, wholeness and peace. Your love inspires our confidence to pray today.

Lord God, we bring our prayers for all who find themselves tormented and oppressed today. We pray for all who find themselves in chains and seem unable to free themselves. We pray for all who seek to bring comfort and support to those who are distressed, disturbed or simply broken down by life.

Lord God, we bring our prayers for the nations, where many feel they are living among the tombs and debris of evil and destruction. We pray for places of war, and for all who have had to leave their homes and families.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Hymn: Listen STF 655 We cannot measure how you feel
Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://youtu.be/OrNoQisGbDw>

We cannot measure how you heal
or answer every sufferer's prayer,
yet we believe your grace responds
where faith and doubt unite to care.
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,
survive to hold and heal and warn,
to carry all through death to life
and cradle children yet unborn.

The pain that will not go away,
the guilt that clings from things long past,
the fear of what the future holds,
are present as if meant to last.
But present too is love which tends
the hurt we never hoped to find,
the private agonies inside,
the memories that haunt the mind.

So some have come who need your help
and some have come to make amends
as hands which shaped and saved the world
are present in the touch of friends.

Lord, let your Spirit meet us here
to mend the body, mind, and soul,
to disentangle peace from pain
and make your broken people whole.

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

A prayer of blessing

May God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, go with us now. May God's blessing be with you, now and always. Amen.

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