

Sermon – Sunday, June 19, 2022

Rev. Randi

The psalmist writes, "Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? And why are you so disquieted within me?"

We see examples of two souls full of heaviness in the readings today. In Kings, we have the story of Elijah suffering from burnout, depression, and fear. He's worked really hard doing the things God called him to do. And all he has to show for it is a threat to his life. He believes he's the only one left doing what God calls. We might look in the mirror and see Elijah in ourselves. Many of us work tirelessly, doing what we feel God calls us to do, and every once in a while, we suffer because of it. Maybe we take a stand that is right but unpopular, and now, we feel we have a target on our back. Perhaps we feel like everything we do is in vain because no one else is joining us in the work.

In the Gospel, we have Legion. Today we would likely describe Legion as suffering from schizophrenia or multiple personality disorder. I want to be clear that mental illness is an illness and isn't simply the result of sin. But, I also want to broaden our outlook on the healing power of Jesus. Because the Gerasene man could represent any of us who struggle with many things in our hearts and minds that cause us anxiety, depress us, or take our focus away from God. We struggle with inflation when we fill our cars or our grocery carts. We struggle with grief over those who have died over the past two years. We struggle under burdens of heavy debt or guilt from something wrong we may have done years ago. We struggle from the heaviness of resentment we still hold for things done to us years ago. All those many things hold us captive, preventing our true, healthy selves from being free to live the life God called us to, just as all those spirits within Legion held him captive.

In both these situations, however, these two men go to meet God, and God turns up and brings healing. God sends angels to feed Elijah to give Him strength to continue, then reminds Elijah that he's not alone. Then, he sends Elijah back to work.

Jesus heals the Gerasene man, ridding him of all those things that have held him captive for so long. Then, he gives him a mission.

God heals these two men just as God heals us when we meet God. God doesn't always heal us physically. Physical health is important to us, but it's not the most important type of health. Our bodies are only temporary. Our souls, however, are immortal. Our soul's health is the most important. God heals our souls. God's healing gives us the freedom to be who we are and to serve God fully with all our gifts.

Today is Juneteenth, the 157th anniversary of the day when news of the Emancipation Proclamation was brought to Texas. Although Lincoln had signed the Proclamation 2 ½ years earlier, notice of it depended upon Union troops. Texas had few Union troops and was the last state where the news of freedom was proclaimed.

Enslaved African-Americans gained their freedom from a system that kept them from being truly themselves because a human being acted justly and according to the leading of the Spirit. God worked through a human being to bring healing and freedom.

God acts through the Holy Spirit to bring freedom and healing to us, too. Sometimes that healing comes through a kind word from other human beings. Sometimes it comes because we, like Elijah, still our minds and allow God to speak to us, feed us, to give us insights. Sometimes it comes because we surrender and turn over to God all those things that oppress us and keep us chained. Resentment, jealousy, the pull of possessions, debt, addictions, burnout. We may not receive physical healing. Our mental illnesses or addictions may be too entrenched to disappear immediately. But, God heals and frees our soul – the essence of who we are. God frees the essence of who God created us to be.

That a future existed beyond the cave wasn't apparent to Elijah. The Gerasene man was so full of other Spirits that the Spirit of God couldn't thrive. When we're in pain and suffering, the existence of a future isn't apparent to us either. When the spirit of greed or resentment takes over our lives, the Spirit of God can't thrive. Yet both Elijah and the Gerasene man had some part of them that longed for God and went seeking God. Elijah went to the cave. The Gerasene man came out to meet Jesus. If a small part of our soul longs for God, looks for God, and trusts God, we can be healed.

1 As the deer longs for the water-brooks, *

so longs my soul for you, O God.

2 My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God; *

when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?

3 My tears have been my food day and night, *

while all day long they say to me, "Where now is your God?"

4 I pour out my soul when I think on these things:

how I went with the multitude and led them into the house of

God,

5 With the voice of praise and thanksgiving, *

among those who keep holy-day.

6 Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *

and why are you so disquieted within me?

7 Put your trust in God; *

for I will yet give thanks to him,

who is the help of my countenance, and my God.