

Lord God, who calms the troubled waters, we bless you for your presence in the midst of all our fears, all our trials, all our worries. We release to you the things we hold too tightly, and we trust your words of peace. Be among us in this hour and may we lean into your everlasting arms of love, secure that we are yours, now and always. ... May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.

Our UNRAVELING theme concludes this week ...seeking God when our plans fall apart. Each week we spend time looking at our lives in partnership with a biblical narrative where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans and our lives... and weaving us into something new.

The scripture read by Derrick today is from the book of Mark. It is a fascinating story in which much is unraveled, in who Jesus is, in the life of an individual, in the life of a community, and in the sense that healing changes and transforms lives. The question may be how do we respond to the new reality presented to us in healing? Let's begin with looking into the context of the narrative and what new thing is revealed.

First, let me share the fun fact that this story is also found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Mark is thought to be the earliest of the gospels and a source for the other two accounts. We will focus on Mark's account for that reason.

This story comes on the heel of Jesus calming the storm after being awakened by the disciples. Prior to setting out in the boat, Jesus had been teaching with parables, both the crowds and then the disciples, beside the lake. Who wouldn't be tired after teaching and preaching all day?

Having witnessed Jesus calming the storm, the disciples ask the question, 'Who then is this? Even the wind and sea obey him!' (4:31). Immediately following our reading, Jesus & the disciples cross the lake, encounter a crowd and two more healings occur, the woman with a hemorrhage and the daughter of a synagogue leader. These stories all serve to answer the question the disciples asked...who is he?

With that mystery unraveling, let's dive into our text for today.

The disciples and Jesus find themselves on the eastern shore of the lake. This area is part of the Decapolis, a Gentile region defined by ten cities. To the Hebrew people, it is unclean territory. Upon landing they are met by a man who lives among the tombs and is possessed by an evil spirit. So we are presented with a triple play in being 'unclean', by location, by shelter, and by being occupied. The man is triple unclean. And yet, Jesus speaks to the man and seeks to heal him. Perhaps you noted that the spirit knew Jesus identity as 'Son of the Most High God' (v7). Jesus' identity is clear to the evil forces. The gospel writer makes it clear, Jesus is engaged in spiritual warfare... and Mark believes the unrighteousness of the world comes from this cosmic struggle.

Jesus sends Legion's unclean spirits into the herd of pigs which then run into the sea and drown. Naturally, the swineherds go and tell what has happened and the town comes running to see.

First thing they notice is the previously unclean man, clothed, and in his right mind. The people are filled with awe. Then the story about the pigs becomes known and the people are filled with fear, begging Jesus to leave. Finally, the healed man is full of gratitude and expresses his desire to come along as a disciple. Jesus urges the man to go to his home and tell his people what the Lord has done for him, showing him mercy. When he does so, all are amazed.

Surely the unraveling of a man occupied by evil spirits is cause for celebration. Surely the ability of casting out unclean spirits is amazing and disconcerting. Certainly the loss of the herd of pigs is an economic hardship. Can anyone comprehend the total transformation in this story... or the unraveling that occurs in the midst of healing?

I love this story...this story full of change, transformation, full of love and mercy. One reason I love this story is due to the writer's great detail. Legion is a person in deep pain...lashing out in fury, breaking devices to bind him so he cannot hurt himself. He knows he must live away from loved ones in this state. He knows and attacks himself in self-loathing. Yet Jesus comes across the lake to meet him. And Legion rushes to meet Jesus, knowing who Jesus is.

I wish seeking help was just this easy... for those who struggle daily with challenges in sobriety, in getting out of bed, in accomplishing tasks by due dates and deadlines, this story rings true to the daily struggle to see light and hope.

There are many persons who have sought and received help from family, friends, and professionals. There are just as many who struggle to name or accept that there are non-germ illnesses that require help from a psychiatrist, psychologist or licensed counselor.

In my own challenge with depression, there was a great relief to know a name for the sadness and the difficulty getting going each day. There was great relief in receiving a prescription with the diagnosis, though there wasn't a promise that I would feel better overnight or wouldn't have side effects from the medication.

But there was also the challenge of stigma...what would people think if they knew... would they look at me differently, or talk about me. Thankfully, for me the combination of medication and talk therapy helped quiet the negative self-talk patterns and begin to replace them with affirmations, and goal setting without fear of failure. I began to experience more energy and get enjoyment out of each day. I was able to complete more and more tasks and function without tears or feeling a need to sleep.

The good news in my story is the sensitivity and compassion this life experience has taught me to have with myself, as much as for others. The transformation I experienced leads me as I meet and speak with people. In a sense, the scars, the fears, the depression and doubt are transformed into hope, joy, light and laughter. I can reference this as I work with others as they seek transformation in themselves.

I met Jesus as the listening ears of church friends. I met Jesus when they prayed for me, when they prayed with me. I met Jesus as I was held when the tears kept streaming. I met Jesus as these friends reached out to check in now and then.

The hard part, friends, is in allowing help and healing to begin. That's where this story helps me know that it is okay to seek help in Jesus...Legion comes to Jesus even as Jesus comes to him.

The second area to unravel is the response to the healing. In the scripture passage, there is fear and awe, and there is anger, too. For those who have not experienced transformation, it is hard to accept the new path. For someone newly transformed, it can be hard to walk free from the former ways and chains of stigma and marginalization.

This is the value of on-going support, professional, as well as understanding friends. As Christians, how might we support one another in walking new pathways in freedom from addictions, mental health challenges, grief, and loneliness, especially in light of the need to protect ourselves and others as we wear masks, keep safe distance, and wash our hands? How might we address our own insecurities or fears without bias or marginalizing others?

As we have learned from earlier biblical study, listening makes a difference, being present to the moment without trying to fix anything, having a forgiving mind and an open heart matters, sharing compassion and showing mercy reflects the mind and heart of Jesus.

Have you met Jesus? There's a favorite song that asks the question, have you seen Jesus, my Lord? He's here in plain view. Take a look, open your eyes, he'll show it to you. The verses proclaim Christ to be in the sunset and feathery clouds, in the ocean lapping at your feet, in the eyes of the one hanging on the cross with love and forgiveness, and Jesus is in the eyes of those standing with you...right there in your midst.

In these days and time of stress & division, I am thankful for the Jesus I see in others. Friends, let us be open to seeing one another with the eyes of Jesus.

Let us be the arms that hold a young man wrecked in grief at the sudden unforeseen loss of his brother. Let us be the Church who provides 32 coats for the families in need. Let us be the Church who sells quilt & yard sale items to send \$1000 to benefit the Food Bank. It is in opening your hearts that light shines, that peace and gladness flood the mind, and hope and strength are realized.

And the thing is that in seeing Jesus in another, Jesus is seen in you; that my friends, is transformational, for you and for the one in front of you. That is a transformed life transforming lives.

Put your hand in the hand of the man who stilled the water and calmed the sea. Trust in the transforming love that heals the sick, the blind and the hardened heart. May each of us be unraveled by healing so that we can share the Jesus we've seen.

Amen.

Do Prayers of people, then,

Go to Prayer of
Confession led by Liturgist

Lord's Prayer