

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I found a reference to a seminary professor who tried to make a bit of a joke out of today's gospel reading. He apparently delighted in telling his classes that this was the first known instance of "deviled ham." No idea if he ever made it on Comedy Central.

But in truth, there is nothing funny about what is happening here. Instead, on this day, when almost all of us are basically comfortable, and blessed with God's goodness and plenty, I think that we have a real disconnect with this story, because there are different kinds of comfort and discomfort.

Is everyone here at least mildly comfortable, sitting in these pews? We hope so...even though they are not like your favorite chair at home. I would wager that the greatest common concern right now, this moment, is the length of this sermon.

We do have coffee hour right after, as always. But can we presume that everyone here has had at least the chance to get a bit to breakfast beforehand? I would think so. Even with the singing of the processional hymn, I do not hear any grumbling tummies on the way in.

Do we all have plans for today? Or at least visions of how we are going to enjoy the remainder of this day...a day of relative leisure? I suspect that very few of us have to go to work today, and that, by and large, we will otherwise be "taking it easy". Right?

By and large, God has answered in the past, and continues to answer, the constant prayers of the people of this church for "daily bread". To give to us what it is that we need...not want, but need for each and every day. For the vast majority of us, we are beyond subsistence issues, and are more concerned about our comfort levels.

But, on the other hand, we may also have some people who do not worry about their comfort because life for them is already so difficult that nothing we can do or say will likely make it a whole lot better. They come here because they still hold out hope that maybe something will be said or done that will bring a measure of relief, some purpose to the pain they are now experiencing.

For them, it is not about comfort, but really more about survival.

That is life sometimes. When it gets so frantic, or cuts so close...such as worrying about how to buy the groceries, or pay this month's rent which is already three weeks late, you care less about the price of gas or what the Kardashians are doing. The only thing you know is the churning of your stomach and the pain in your heart...not sure you will even make it through the day.

So, you come hoping you will hear a word...just a word....of hope. Something that will keep you going, something that will make sense of the chaos. What you want more than anything else in all the world is help. Pure and simple, that is your only goal: help.

Frankly, almost all of us are generally calm and comfortable and might not relate to this story, but for those others...those whose lives have been extremely difficult as of late...they know what I mean. Looking for answers, relief from life's daily, throbbing difficulty. And perhaps they have come here, thinking that maybe, just maybe, Jesus is the One who can give it to them... can offer them peace, real peace, even when life is nothing but chaos.

Well, if it does nothing else, our gospel story this morning shows us where Jesus operates and what Jesus does best. It illustrates very clearly that he plunges into the chaos of life and brings to it a sense of calmness and peace.

Just prior to this, he has just come from an incident on the sea where he had calmed the storm...and, after this, he will heal a woman of her long-standing hemorrhage and resurrect a young girl from death. It is not by accident that Luke places all these stories together. He is telling us that Jesus is more than just a teacher. He does not just talk a good game, he delivers as well. He knows what to do...and brings calm and peace to that which is chaos.

The man who has come down in biblical history to be known to us as the Gadarene Demoniac may be the one who represents the chaos that some of us are experiencing. After all, for him, life is nothing but chaos. Consumed by his own personal demons, he has taken on the name of Legion, for he is not one whole person but is a living, breathing composite of many different wicked personalities.

In knowing they are being confronted by a stronger power than they, the demons request of Jesus that he do anything with them but send them back to the place from which they have come. "The pigs," they cry out to Jesus, "Send us into the pigs!"

Why the pigs? Even though this is Gentile country, it is close enough to Galilee that pigs are not welcome here either, but they are all over the place. Why? They are there to feed the Roman soldiers, the Roman soldiers who are an ever-present reminder that these people who tend the pigs are in bondage to their captors, the Roman soldiers who lend this tormented man his name: Legion. And as if that were not enough, the wild boar was the logo of the Roman legion stationed in Palestine.

So, when we scratch the surface of it, we discover that there is a lot of symbolism in this story. But when life is just another word for chaos...when we are experiencing our own demons...there is little symbolic about it. The daily grind, the pain, the anxiety are not symbolic, they are real.

Unlike modern pain relief medicine commercials on television, this story does not promise “instant relief”....that Jesus will overcome our pain as quickly as when he took away the demons from the man named Legion. But this is what he will do: he will come to you in the midst of your personal chaos and offer you his divine and healing presence, and at least...at the very least...you will know you are not alone.

When dealing with demons, the name means everything. Those who have dealt with demons of alcoholism and other addictions will tell you that admitting and naming the problem is half the solution. Naming the demon is the first step in casting it out.

Too often, we cannot name our own demons...and there are other times that we can name those demons but, as they say, there is the devil that you know and then there is the devil that you do not know. Which is to say that as unsettled and chaotic and difficult as one’s life may be, there is a comfort level...there is that word again, comfort....there is a comfort level to knowing and experiencing that life, if you want to call it “life”. And that - quote - comfort level - unquote - with a perpetual existence of attempting personal influence or control within a life cycle of disaster and chaos is preferable to the relative unknown of giving and trusting to our loving God through Jesus as the Christ.

But for Jesus, naming the demons is easy. The one who calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee can calm the storms in our lives. He knows us by name, which means...within the scope of Biblical culture and history...that he knows our problems and can help us to name our demons. Then, by the power of the Son of the God Most High, he can cast them out...but that can be scary. Maybe that is why the people asked that Jesus leave in this story...and why, even today, people do not really invite him in the first place...afraid he will start naming their demons.

In the name of Jesus, there is healing and hope. He is the means whereby we can move from just mere existence, the maintenance mode of the chaos within and around us....to the point of actually living into the name that we should long to be known by. The name that Jesus knows for us....”child of God”.

Even in the midst of chaos, and our predisposition to tackle it on our own, let the bread and the cup be his Presence to each of us, so that we will know that even when life is really, really hard, we can begin to feel his peace and know that we are not alone....in the name of the living and loving God, come to us as the Father, and as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit.

Amen.