

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit

SERVICE AT HOME

Sunday, June 19, 2022

Prepared by the Revd Gareth Hill

Call to Worship

God of grace, draw us close to you today. Help us to bring our whole selves to worship, not seeking to hide anything from you and waiting on you to comfort and heal. Amen.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Amazing Grace (my chains have gone)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKo3T0i9gqo>

Amazing grace - how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I'm found,
was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed

My chains are gone I've been set free,
my God, my Saviour has ransomed me,
and like a flood His mercy rains
unending love, a grace.

The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
the sun forbear to shine,
but God, who called me here below,
will be forever mine,
will be forever mine,
you are forever mine.

*Written by: Stan Roto Walker, Traditional, David Pritchard-blunt, Chris Tomlin, Louie Giglio
Lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC*

Prayer

We give you all thanks and praise, O God, and openly declare how much you have done for us.

Since the day you brought the earth to birth, you have been present in the sounds of sheer silence, where deep roars to deep; and through your law and prophets you guarded us and kept us from destruction. When we were imprisoned in condemnation, chained and shackled by demons too many to name, you sent your light and truth in your child, Jesus the Christ.

He drove our tormentors into the abyss and reconciled us to ourselves and to one another. When he was crucified, you raised him to new life and plunged us into his death, burial and resurrection.

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high, we offer you thanks and praise at all times through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Luke 8: 26-39

Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac

26 Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me'— 29 for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) 30 Jesus then asked him, 'What is

your name?’ He said, ‘Legion’; for many demons had entered him. 31They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

32 Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

34 When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 35Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. 36Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. 37Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 38The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39‘Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.’ So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

We cannot measure how you heal (StF 655)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3DfpE-s8Qs>

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) Words:
From Love From Below © 1989, WGRG, Iona Community,
Glasgow G2 3DH Scotland. <www.wgrg.co.uk>*

Sermon

My memory growing up is of sermons on this Bible passage that referred to the madman and the pigs. We wouldn’t throw such labels around quite so casually now: thank God.

Equally, we wouldn’t be quite so cavalier at the idea of wholesale destruction of a herd of pigs as previous preachers may have been.

Perhaps, to contemporary hearers, the story is so riddled with pitfalls that it’s tempting to skip over it and find more obvious material to reflect on. I confess that was my first response as a preacher: it’s too challenging to handle. Move on.

But often the uncomfortable parts of Bible stories are exactly where we meet Jesus at his most winsome. Here is no different.

This story contains one of the most beautiful encounters that Jesus had during his earthly ministry. It comes in a simple question to the person usually labelled as ‘the demoniac’. Jesus asked: ‘What is your name?’

No one cared. The community lived in fear of a demon-possessed terror who didn’t live in a home like ‘normal’ people; who didn’t wear clothes like ‘normal’ people; who had to be chained unlike ‘normal’ people; who lives near pigs unlike ‘normal’ people; who spent his days in the place of the dead unlike ‘normal’ people.

While no one knew or cared who the man was, the demons knew and cared who Jesus was. They beg Jesus, who they call 'Son of the Most High God', not to torment them! Surely they were the tormentors.

No one cared about the man's name except Jesus. But, because Jesus cared, healing was on offer. Jesus cared because this too was a human being who God loved and who needed to be rescued out of their brokenness.

As a momentary aside, it's fascinating to note that Luke can't resist a dig at the occupying Romans. The demons give the man the name Legion.

Jeffrey John, in The Meaning in the Miracles, writes: 'The demoniac is called by the Latin name 'Legion', referring to a company of up to 6,000 Roman soldiers. This strongly suggests ... linking the exorcism of the evil powers occupying the demoniac with acts of Roman oppression. The demons' preference for pigs is because of the animal's negative association in Judaism. The association of a Roman legion with a herd of pigs was a priceless piece of irony.'

As Luke tells the story the man has no identity except for his affliction: he is the demoniac.

How many other people do we know of who are downgraded by a label rather than being named in the presence of God: the divorcee, the cancer sufferer, the lesbian, the migrant, the enemy?

Jesus' act of freeing the man from all that had possessed him brought the community to see what all the fuss was about Luke says: '*when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind*'.

The response to such healing was not deep joy at a life restored but fear. The community couldn't handle it and asked Jesus to leave. Such power was unnerving.

But at least one person remained to remind the rest. Jesus told the man: '*Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.*' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him'.

That was disruptive in its own way. Fred Craddock, in his commentary on Luke, says: 'A community learns to live with demonic forces, isolating and partially controlling them. If it is not 'spiritualizing' the story too much to say so, this partially successful balance of tolerance and management of the demonic among them also allowed the people to keep attention off their own lives. But now the power of God for good comes to their community and it disturbs a way of life they had come to accept.'

Which voices do we need to listen to? Who are the ones who can tell a healing story and shake us out of our complacency? What are their names? Amen.

Prayer for Others

My God, my God, come close to your people!
You come to us to rescue us from powers that are too great for us.

Come to the help of all who face trouble or danger today.

O Lord our help,
come quickly to our aid!

O Lord, you bind us together as brothers and sisters, beloved in Christ.

Fill our hearts, our lives, and our voices with your praise,
and make us bold to proclaim your name to all people.

O Lord our help,
come quickly to our aid!

O Lord, we lift up those who are close to us who face trouble,
especially those who are sick, sorrowing, or confused.

Send forth your healing and restoring love.

O Lord our help,
come quickly to our aid!

O Lord, we pray for those who are poor, hungry, or homeless,

who are closer to us than many of us realize.
Open our hands to share what we have,
and open our hearts to share in relationship.

O Lord our help,
come quickly to our aid!

O Lord, we pray for all who are entrusted with power
over nations, corporations, and the powers of the world,
that their decisions might honour you and seek the welfare of all people.

O Lord our help,
come quickly to our aid!

O Lord, we pray for all the generations:
with thanksgiving for those who have gone before us and enjoy your eternal rest;
and with hope for those who will follow us, to whom we must still proclaim your salvation.
Keep your church faithful in every age.

O Lord our help,
come quickly to our aid!

Keep us faithful to you, O Lord,
and teach us to serve you. Amen.

Rev. Nathan Williams, Echo Hill Presbyterian Church, Cedar Rapids IA in Liturgylink.net

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

The kingdom of God (StF 255)

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

The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
for Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,
and here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share,
and hope is awakened in place of despair.

The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,
our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
in Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
the heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
and all things cry glory to God all in all!

Bryn Rees (1911–1983) Words: © Alexander Scott

Blessing

Go now, proclaiming to all how much Jesus has done for you.

Be as one with each other in Christ.
Wait for the Lord, and be ready to hear God's voice, even in the sounds of sheer silence.

And may God be your fortress;
May Christ Jesus release you from all that torments you;

And may the Holy Spirit give you light and truth to sustain you day and night.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
In the name of Christ. Amen.

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