

Luke 8:26-39; Pride Sunday; Pentecost 2; June 19, 2022
Rich Weingartner

Grace to you and peace from God our parent, Jesus our Savior, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Happy Pride everyone. Happy Father's Day to all those who are father figures in people's lives. And Happy Juneteenth Day. There is a lot going on today, which is great because it reflects the wide diversity of God's creation - all of which deserves to be celebrated. As an RIC congregation we have committed ourselves to ensure God's message of radical and unlimited love is shared and proclaimed to all. We committed to make ourselves better through learning, confession, and growth. In fact, it was 5 years ago yesterday that we at Faith celebrated our new RIC identity with our Diversity Sunday service. So Happy 5th Anniversary! We hope that today's service and today's message helps us more fully live into our promise as an RIC congregation. Parts of today's service were specifically chosen because of our focus on celebrating Pride and to work to ensure the language we use is inclusive and reflective of all of God's creation.

Now, let's take a look at today's Old Testament reading from Isaiah. It starts out with God telling us that God is waiting for us to turn to them. No matter how much the people (and that includes us) ignore God and reject God and think they are too good for God, God is continuing to wait for the people to turn to God. All this waiting, and seeing God's

people reject God, understandably causes God to want to “repay into their laps their iniquities and their ancestors’ iniquities together.” However, God’s grace is there and God doesn’t repay us what is due to us, as there is still a blessing in us. God finds the blessing in us, no matter how small the blessing is and no matter the sins we have committed. God is always there for us and knows the good in us outweighs any sins and faults we have.

This passage also ties into the Gospel with the description of ways people turn from God as those “who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine’s flesh, with broth of abominable things in their vessels.” These are all things that, according to Jewish law, make people unclean and thus not worthy to be close to God. We already see from this passage, that even these things cannot keep God from us.

When we turn to today’s Gospel from Luke one might want to focus on the demon possessed man and try to figure out more details about it. What exactly was the possession? How or why did it happen? Why did the pigs have to die? Or any other possible details in the story, but I want to focus on the whole story.

First, we must recognize that what Jesus did was radical. He was breaking so many “rules” of how to be a good Jewish man. First, he went into a foreign land among non-believers. He didn’t accidentally end up there and go “Whoops, my mistake”, no, Jesus purposefully went there, knowing full well he was breaking cultural norms. Then

to break even more rules, he went among death in the tombs, being near pigs, which were considered an unclean animal, and in a town of people who raised and ate them.

Next, to make sure that we all knew that Jesus had no qualms about being radical, he went and talked to an unclean, demon possessed man. A person society had cast out as an “unwanted” or “other” - someone they didn’t want around them. All of these would certainly make Jesus unclean.

Why would Jesus do this? Because Jesus was radical - he wasn’t here to follow the rules, the rules that society created, he was here to follow and show God’s love. This meant doing many counter-cultural things. Not only does Jesus associate with the demon possessed man - Jesus healed him and cast the demons out.

Jesus’s actions caused the people of the town to be afraid of Jesus. While the story doesn’t specifically say they were afraid of Jesus, it does specifically say they cast Jesus out of their town. If a person is afraid of something, you try to remove what is making you afraid. So, if the townspeople were afraid of something else, they would have focused their actions on something else, but they didn’t. They asked Jesus to leave.

Why were they afraid of Jesus? He had power over demons? He made the man clean and to his right mind? He upset their economy by having the pigs killed? All of the

above? We may never know for sure, but I feel it was more because Jesus threatened their way of life overall - he shook up their beliefs. They had been living along just fine and Jesus comes in and changes things - makes them think new things - of a new way of life.

Taking a closer look at the end of the story, Michael Rogness explains:

“At the end of the story, the man “had been healed,” a word from the Greek *sozo*, which can also be translated “saved,” “delivered,” or “made whole.” He is not only delivered from the demon and not only “cured” of the terrible burden, but had been altogether “healed” and “saved.” That leads into the important last verse of the story: “He went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.” He has not only become a follower of Jesus, but a “proclaimer” as well.”

(<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-12-3/commentary-on-luke-826-39-3>)

So - where does this leave us? Are we the demon possessed man who needs healing so we can be saved and made whole? Are we the villagers who are scared of Jesus and the change that comes with his radical new way of life? Probably a little of both.

How often do we not want to change our way of life, how we worship, who or what we view as acceptable in life? How often is it just easier to continue to leave the “others” by

themselves so that we don't have to change to welcome and include them? Do we do this because we are afraid of what the change will bring, and because of that, we cast Jesus out of our lives, our church, our community?

While we may do that, that is certainly not our calling. Our calling is to be a follower of Jesus - no, not just a follower, but a proclaimer of Jesus. To fully live into God's promise of love and wholeness, we have been shown by Jesus that we need to be radical and do whatever it takes, even if it is against everything society expects, to fully proclaim God's love to all.

This especially includes those who so often hear that God's love isn't for them - our gay, lesbian, and bisexual siblings, our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color siblings, neurodivergent, poor, asexual and aromantic, gender queer, transgender, intersex, non-binary, agender, people with disabilities, and any other category society places on people to separate them from society and is used to deny God's fully inclusive and wonderful love for them.

You might be wondering, well - how can I proclaim this? You might be thinking "I'm never going to be a preacher", or "I'm not comfortable in front of a congregation", or "I don't have time to plan church events." Good news - we proclaim the wonderful Gospel of God's redeeming love for all, through our everyday lives. It isn't in the church that we proclaim, it is everyday out in the world.

When you use someone's correct pronouns or include your pronouns in introductions to create a safe space for others - you are proclaiming God's love. When you attend a rally or write a letter in support of marginalized people - you are proclaiming God's love.

When you donate to our food pantry, volunteer to be on the box brigade, or donate to help our refugees in our parish house - you are proclaiming God's love. When you vote for candidates and ballot questions that work to protect and ensure equality and equity for all people, especially those who are often at a disadvantage - you are proclaiming God's love. When you ensure a space or event is accessible to people with disabilities - you are proclaiming God's love. When you educate yourself on cultures and backgrounds that aren't your own, when you learn about the true history of marginalized people - you are proclaiming God's love. When you attend events or do activities that you might be afraid of doing or makes you uncomfortable because it is stretching your understanding of God's love and becoming closer to all of God's creation - you are proclaiming God's love.

We can do all this because we are freed from our sins by Jesus Christ. Because we are freed from our sins, we don't have to focus on ourselves and being right with God, that is already done - we can focus on bringing God's love and wholeness to all of God's creation.

Which brings us to the new testament reading from Galatians - "Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."

This is the good news - we are not bound by laws and being put under discipline - we are justified by Faith, through Jesus Christ. Jesus came to be the ultimate example of God's amazing, inclusive, and redeeming love for all. This love is what makes us all equal, beloved, children of God. That love that always has been and always will be.

When the passage talks about "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female;" I don't believe this is saying these identities of people no longer exist - that would be removing valid and valued identities of people. I am a male, I am a Lutheran, I am gay, these are all very important parts of who I am. Instead of denying that these parts of me exist and are valid, what this passage is saying is, these identities of people are **not** to be used to divide and separate people, and they aren't to be used to determine who gets and who doesn't get God's love. "For all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise". We aren't divided in God's vision - we are all inheritors of God's promise of love and eternal life.

So - in summary - Jesus, through his life, let us know that we do not need to be afraid to go against cultural norms, and to be bold to share God's love for all. Through God's love, the ways society divides people into us and them, haves and have nots, worthy and not worthy, sinners and saints - have been torn down for we are all one in Christ Jesus. Through Jesus we are saved from being judged and have been freed to be not only followers of Jesus, but proclaimers of Jesus and God's holy and inclusive love for all. As proclaimers, we share God's work through our Hands in our everyday lives. Thus ensuring that all we say and do reflects God's inclusive love for all people, especially those that society marginalizes - our LGBTQIA+, black, indigenous, people of color, neurodivergent, and poor siblings, refugees, people who are food insecure or experiencing homelessness, people who have disabilities, and all other people in society that are often told they don't matter or aren't loved by God. Through our actions, as proclaimers of Christ, they will know they are loved by God, and by us. Amen.