

Year C – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost; Lectionary 12 – June 22, 2025

Pastor Megan Floyd

Luke 8:26-39

*Letter from Birmingham Jail*, MLK Jr.

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the source of our liberation. Amen.

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This past Thursday was Juneteenth... it is the day we honor June 19, 1865, when the last remaining people who were enslaved in Texas were liberated by the US Army... three years after the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued.

A few of us came together to honor this day by reading and discussing Martin Luther King, Jr's, *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, from April 16, 1963.

Nearly 100 years after the liberation of those people who were enslaved... we were reminded in that letter... that people of color in this country... were still not free.

They... were still bound.

And 62 years after this convicting letter... 62 years after MLK wrote of his 'hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice would soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding would be lifted from our fear-drenched communities...'

we sat with the pain of knowing that we are still not free from our sin of holding our fellow siblings captive.

We... are still bound.

So many people in our country are committed to their idea of what is right and acceptable, that instead of growing in their understanding of the beautiful diversity of God's creation, they have added to the categories of people who are bound by our prejudice...

People of color still face discrimination from white people... and this now overwhelmingly includes Native Americans, and our immigrant, refugee, and migrant communities.

Additionally, our LGBTQIA+ neighbors face prejudice and discrimination as they have started living more openly as their beautiful, authentic selves...

And yet, the Supreme Court just issued a ruling last week to uphold a state law allowing for the ban of medical care for transgender youth... disregarding the mountain of evidence that this care literally saves lives...

We are bound by our sin... and we cannot free ourselves.

We are bound... but we have before us, our God in the flesh... Jesus... the source of our liberation.

Jesus... the one who comes to release our chains... release us from our prisons and enslavement of our own making.

Jesus... comes to us... to set us free.

If we are willing... if we are willing to be freed.

Our gospel text tells a story of a man plagued by demons... so many demons... he is so burdened... so bound by these demons... that he identifies as his demons...

When Jesus asks him his name... he replies... Legion... for we are many.

This man is literally bound... bound by chains, shackles, and by distance... separated from his society... marginalized... and feared.

For Jesus and his disciples, this man is the most unclean of all the unclean... he is a foreigner... a gentile... he is possessed by demons... he is naked and living among the dead... in the tombs.

For Jesus and his disciples, this man is not just outside of the realm of what they found acceptable... he was in another world.

And yet... Jesus shows up here... because there is no place that is beyond Jesus' reach and authority... but it was here, among these tombs and with this poor man... it was here... that he was needed most.

This man was bound... and Jesus frees him.

Jesus comes to this man because this man needs Jesus... but in going to him, we see, yet again, that Jesus is always challenging the borders and boundaries around the way we think things should be.

Jesus is always challenging us to widen our understanding of God's love for all of God's creation... and when we understand that... we loosen our own bonds and draw closer to Christ.

And yet... living in such a tied up way is what we know best...

After this man is freed from his demons, he immediately wants to be bound to Jesus... but Jesus is not going to trade one form of bondage for another... no.

Jesus tells him... that he is free... and to go and share all that God has done for him.

He is free.

And his neighbors?

...they are still bound by their fear...

perhaps even more afraid now that this man whom they thought was bound up and controlled is now free and living among them... as if he belonged.

They preferred it when this man who was different... was set apart... so they didn't have to think about him... or care for him...

The man is now free... but they are still bound to their sin... and unwilling to be freed.

Thinking back to Dr. King's letter from Birmingham Jail... King writes 'that the greatest stumbling block is not the KKK, but the white moderate... who is more devoted to order than to justice...

Who prefers a negative peace, which is the absence of tension, to a positive peace, which is the presence of justice...'

The people in the country of the Gerasenes... wanted to chain up the one who was different... they wanted a "negative peace" ...they wanted him to not remind them that he existed.

They wanted him to remain bound.

White people, after the abolition of slavery, wanted people of color to remain oppressed... they wanted both whites and blacks to buy into the false notion of white supremacy...

...and many today are still bound to this sinful endeavor.

And those who are uncomfortable with the LGBTQIA+ community... really of queerness of any kind... they also want those folks to remain bound, hidden away from view.

They certainly want people who are transgender, or trans-queer, to not exist, and they think they can legislate them out of existence.

They want a negative peace... an absence of tension... rather than a positive peace... which requires shaking off the shackles of sin and working for justice for those we have oppressed.

But Jesus... remember where Jesus went?

...he didn't go to the townspeople to try and convince them that this man was their brother, and they should care for him and provide for his needs.

No. Jesus went to the man who was bound... because that's where he was needed.

And we, who seek Jesus... that's where we need to go, too. We need to go to those who are bound...

Jesus is the source of our true liberation from oppressive forces, both known and unknown.

And when we seek Jesus... we will find him among those we have pushed away... we will find him among those who are bound.

When we seek Jesus... we will find him when we engage in the work of breaking those bonds... the work of seeking justice for those who are oppressed.

A genuine relationship with Jesus and a commitment to the way of the gospel can only compel us to engage in the pursuit of social justice.

For you cannot love your neighbor... if you insist that they remain bound.

If we try... and Lord help us, we try all the time... we find that we are also bound... bound by our sin... bound by our fear of the 'other.'

We are bound... and we cannot free ourselves.

But Jesus... Jesus is our liberation... and Jesus has shown us the way to freedom...

We cannot become free by seeking liberation for ourselves.

We can *only* become free by seeking liberation for our neighbor.

When we engage in the work of seeking justice and life for our neighbor who is bound by oppressive forces... we, too, will become free...

Seeking liberation for our neighbor... brings us face to face with Jesus...

Seeking liberation for our neighbor... is loving our neighbor... just as Jesus commanded... and engaging in this work... frees us both.

Amen.