

SUNDAY June 22, 2025 "Jesus Heals"

Psalm 41 766 VU Galatians 3:23-29 Luke 8:26-39

Summer is here and yes it is very warm and humid... but remember back in February when there was ice and snow and we said-- summer was coming! Well it is here! And as we mark the beginning of summer we also look at a time of change. Our worship schedule for the summer beginning on July 6 at 10 a.m. and next week we will not meet. This is in order that all the church has a stop time to rest from the busyness of this spring. Our worship schedule for the summer will focus on various topics as suggested by members and the list is in your bulletins and newsletters and there is quite a variety!

Most weeks we come together and worship God and discuss an important aspect of faith in Jesus and the Spirit which moves amongst us. Having faith is what binds us together as a community in Jesus but there is a vast difference between intellectual faith and genuine faith. And to describe this difference the story of a famous tightrope walker who in the late 1890's, strung a wire across Niagara Falls. He inched his way along the wire from one side of the falls to the other as 10,000 people watched. When he got to the other side, the crowd cheered wildly. Finally, the tightrope walker was able to quiet the crowd and shouted to them, 'Do you believe in me?'. The crowd shouted back, 'We believe! We believe!' How could they not? They just witnessed this man do something daring and risky.

After the crowd quieted down he shouted to them, 'I'm going back across the tightrope but this time I'm going to carry someone on my back. Do you believe I can do that?'. The crowd yelled back, 'We believe! We believe!'. He quieted the crowd one more time and then asked them, 'Who will be that person?'. The crowd suddenly became silent. Not a single person was willing to apply the very truth that they professed to believe in that the tightrope walker could cross the falls with a person on his back. They believed because they had seen him, but was it genuine faith?

The story from Luke 8 is a difficult story about Legion so named because he had many demons. Demons we have to make note are what the people who recorded these stories could not or did not understand fully. From our 21st century understanding of how this man is described- naked (because he took all of his clothes off), lived in the tombs or cave like a bear, and was guarded and bound like a wild animal which posed as a threat to others. In this story Jesus and the disciples arrive to be met by this man. When he sees Jesus, he falls before him and shouts "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you do not

torment me". Jesus commanded the unclean spirit/ demon to come out of this man. Then what is amazing is that Jesus does not talk to this unclean spirit but directs his conversation to the man himself. What is your name? "Legion" the man responds. And then 'they' begged Jesus not to order them to go into the water. Had this been tried before? We do not know. All we know is that Jesus is looking for a solution to "Legion's" problem.

Jesus sees a herd of pigs on the hillside close by. The demons don't want to be forced into the water but beg Jesus to let them go into the pigs. So they go-- out of the man, to the pigs. But the pigs are now filled with these demons and the pigs run down the side of the hill and into the lake. They all drown with the demons.

Those whose task it is to look after the pigs in the fields saw what occurred to the pigs, run away telling everyone what had happened. Meanwhile the man from whom the demons had emerged gets dressed and sits near Jesus and is his ok. The people who see Legion are afraid of him. Then they turn to those who saw what happened. They then turn to Jesus ask him to leave. Jesus gets in the boat and returns across the lake. Legion wants to go with him and begs Jesus. But it is what Jesus says to this man that calls us to question our faith too. Is it intellectual or genuine faith? Before he gets into the boat and leaves, Jesus says, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he did this according the reading.

When we read this story we might get stuck with the different characters- yes Jesus, Legion and the demons. But there are also the pigs and the people whose job it is to look after them- swine herders. We do not know whether the pigs were wild in the region or belonged to a specific farmer. The owner of the pigs is not seen but those in charge of the care of the pigs ran to tell others what had happened. Controversy would have occurred after the demons from the man went into the pigs which lead to their death by drowning. The whole herd is said to have fallen into the lake and drowned. The controversy was that Jesus and the disciples were Jews and at that time, Jewish people generally considered pigs unclean and avoided raising them for food. However there is evidence that some Jews, particularly in areas influenced by Roman or Gentile culture, did raise pigs. The reason for this was that trade would occur with non-Jewish people and better profits might result.

Yet when we read the story of Legion and his healing we often focus at what cost? All the pigs drowned with the demons and the question of what these demons are is never answered. And rarely do we think about the man as he met Jesus coming out of the boat. He knew who Jesus was, fell down before him, and the demons inside asked what have you to do

with me? Was this the voice of the man alone? Or was it some part within him seeking to be healed by Jesus?

Jesus' response to him after the death of the pigs in the lake gives clear instructions. Go home and declare to others what God has done for you. Jesus is clearly asking him a question of faith and what he believes occurred.

Sometimes we need to be told likewise. Jesus was clear- Go home, tell others and reflect upon God's gifts/ blessings to you. And then ask yourself, what kind of faith do you have, show and tell about? Is it intellectual or genuine? Mind or heart? Or a little bit of both- or are you just unsure?

In our reading from Paul's letter to the Galatians, he writes how things changed after Christ came when one reflected upon faith. Paul writes, 'the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come in Christ, we are all children of God through faith. If you have been baptized into Christ Jesus, you have clothed yourselves in Him. Then we read, "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." One in Christ-- just like Legion-- no longer many demons but one person who has been healed in Christ. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring and heirs to God's promise!"

We may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but does our faith surpass the faith of all those things which cause illness, disease and lack of hope? Are we willing trust our lives with Jesus? Are we willing to follow Him regardless of the cost? Yes you may experience healing in your life of physical challenges but are you willing to put your faith in the One who can totally change your life? When you are in distress do you call upon God and yearn for his help or are you fearful and alone? Where is your faith?

Is your faith intellectual or genuine- in your mind or in your heart? Is your faith caught between and unsure?

If you believe in Christ Jesus he will bringing healing to heart and mind and he will bring opportunities to see you where you are in your faith journey. Do you believe? Do you have faith and is it strong? Are you willing to trust the One who removed demons from Legion and drowned pigs so that the man could live life? Do you trust and believe that Jesus can bring healing in body and spirit and in mind? Is God your strength and shield to what comes your way in this journey we call life? Do you have faith that Jesus can heal and that the Spirit will lead us

into a new and exciting days to come? Do you have hope that will enable us to live and love others in Jesus' name? Then let us remember this as we come together as a community of faith and pray that God's love will be reflected in all that we say and do. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER

holy God of love and hope, we praise you and thank you that in Jesus we may be healed. But help us O God to return to our homes, to tell the stories of faithfulness and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. For it is our faith in him because of his Resurrection story we have hope to experience the joy and wonder of life eternal with you. Bless us O God we pray. In Jesus' name we pray Amen.