

SERMON @ St. Michaels & All Angels

Fr. Christopher Durrant

19 June 16: TRINITY 4

(Luke 8.26-39)

+ In the name of God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

There are many classic sermons to preach on this so-called 'Pig' Sunday. Which should I choose?

Perhaps I could question why Jesus was in Gentile territory, meeting with unclean people who worked in unclean professions, with unclean animals nearby. But hah; Jesus came not for the righteous, but to save sinners: Sermon Over!

Or perhaps I could make the very good argument that this story is a colourful metaphor for the political situation in Israel in the first century AD. In the Gospel Jesus Christ demonstrates His power to expel the occupying Imperial Roman Legion camped in the ruins of Jerusalem – the 10th Fretensis whose banner bore the symbol of the pig – they are unequivocally cast back into the sea from whence they came. In this grand metaphor, Jesus acts to both fulfil and subvert the popular Jewish expectation that their Messiah would be a great military leader. Sermon Over!

Or perhaps, in my 21st century way, I could reflect with you upon demonic possession as mental illness; or the violation of animal rights by drowning pigs; or how the loss of an entire herd might economically ruin the livelihoods of local swine-herders. But I won't. And this sermon has only just begun!

On this 'Pig' Sunday, I would like to draw your attention away from the ghastly image of a squealing swine herd stampeding over a cliff into the deep abyss of the waiting sea, and towards to the *people* in this Gospel story.

At first, these Gentile city people feel very much in control. They have in their midst a strange, dangerous, crazy person. But they have chained him, stripped him, and hid him with the dead where he cannot challenge their way of life. The world is correctly ordered and they are in control.

Jesus enters stage left; Jesus cures the man of his strangeness, of his crazy behaviour, but although now civilised and sitting at His feet, the man remains dangerous. The cured man remains dangerous because is now a walking, talking middle-class proof that Jesus has more power than the city folk; perhaps He even has the power of God.

The city people were profoundly afraid. The people felt fear because, in the presence of Jesus, they knew were not in control after all. Their illusion of control over themselves, *over other people*, and over the world was dispelled.

And it didn't end there; for although the man with the demons submitted to Jesus, his healing was not his final resting phase. Jesus tells him to go and declare throughout the city, to the very folk who are afraid, what God has done for him.

And so there is the sermon, and it's almost over. But we have one last thing to consider: our own lives.

Q) To what extent is our contentment and our satisfaction built upon an illusory sense of our own control?

When you are disturbed in your daily routines by the needs of others, what do you do?

When your future plans are frustrated by illness or failure, what do you do?

When your own resources cannot solve your own problems, what do you do?

I feel afraid.

Yet, even if we face our fear, and throw ourselves into God's care for His guidance and healing, that is not the end. Receiving Jesus in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar is not the end.

In this church of St. Michael's we come to encounter God, to feel afraid, to feel genuine comfort, to be made whole.

When are made whole, we become like the man healed from his demons, and no longer like the fearful crowd of city people. Even though we may beg to stay here in the certainty of Jesus' presence, we are called to return home.

We are called to return home with the informed and mentoring feeling that God alone is in control.

Sermon Over.

+ *Amen.*

Gospel - Luke 8:26-39 (NRSV)

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. ³¹ They 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. ³³ Then 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. ³⁵ Then 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. ³⁶ Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed.

³⁷ Then 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. ³⁸ The 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.

Old Testament Reading - Isaiah 65:1-9

65:1 I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that did not call on my name.

65:2 I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices;

65:3 a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks;

65:4 who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine's flesh, with broth of abominable things in their vessels;

65:5 who say, "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you." These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day long.

65:6 See, it is written before me: I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their laps

65:7 their iniquities and their ancestors' iniquities together, says the LORD; because they offered incense on the mountains and reviled me on the hills, I will measure into their laps full payment for their actions.

65:8 Thus says the LORD: As the wine is found in the cluster, and they say, "Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it," so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all.

65:9 I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah inheritors of my mountains; my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall settle there.