

**WESLEY UNITING CHURCH, FORREST, ACT.
PENTECOST 6
10:45am Liturgy
Sunday, June 30th, 2024**



“Reaching Out, Touching His Hem”: Brian Jones

We do not live in a neutral world: this is the biblical view of things. Last week – Pentecost 5 – the reading from Mark’s Gospel included the account of the destructive character of the storms that threatened to drown Jesus and the disciples (4:35-41). This week, we discover the same insight through a double-loaded reading: a woman scapegoated by religious and social convention for her ‘impurity’, and then, the ‘death’ of Jairus’ daughter. In between these stories of the past two weeks, there lies another: Jesus’ exorcism of the man possessed by demons (Mark 5:1-20).

All these stories reflect the violent nature of our world and invite us to read, to interpret its violence, our violence, with intelligence and sensitivity: to read reality *with depth*. But there is more to Christian faith than correctly interpreting the world around us. We are also invited to understand that Christian salvation is not just a creedal thing, but concrete and world changing. In short, it is not enough to just believe. For belief to be real, it must transform and liberate people, community and society from ‘the destructive’ aspects that haunt us: from ‘the demons’.

THE GATHERING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Prelude

Acknowledgement of First Nation's People

Our Mutuality in a Safe Church

Welcome and Invocation of the Trinity

In the name of the Father,
And of the Son,
And of the Holy Spirit

Collect

Almighty God,
In whom are hidden all the treasures
Of wisdom and knowledge;
Open our eyes to your presence,
And make us more responsive to your call,
In Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God for ever and ever.

Call to Worship through today's Psalm 130

Out of the depths have I called you, O Lord;
Lord hear my voice;
may your ears consider well my voice of plea.
If you Lord were to note what is done amiss,
who could stand?
For there is forgiveness with you;
therefore you shall be respected.
I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him;
in his words is my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord,
more than the watchmen for the morning,
more than the watchmen for the morning.
O Israel, wait for the Lord,
for with the Lord there is mercy;
With him there is generous redemption,
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

Lighting the Community Candle from the Christ candle

Hymn 217, Love divine, all loves excelling (Blaenwern 590)

Charles Wesley, 1707-88

A Prayer: Interrogating the Woman

Oh woman: what was it like...your illness I mean.

Was it painful...physically?

But what of the psychological pain

because others rejected you...

Even other women, who should have understood,
chose to maintain their ritualistic distance from you;
you...unclean outsider!

And what of your anxiety *from the inside*...

No peaceful snugness for you...

but a situation of being driven to your limits,
where you finally made a leap of faith.

Did you plan it, this approach?

Or did it just happen in desperation;

a leap further, deeper into your own anxiety,

not knowing whether this strange rabbi would catch you,

whether God might catch you...

or the nothingness of your situation ultimately devour you.

Isolated and alone

Woman of blood

pours herself towards

the fabric of life.

Our Confession and Reconciliation

Let us be still and listen to the voice of God.

Silence

Let us confess

My judgmental words that may have caused another pain.

My compromises made that may have fragmented truth.

My complacency that may have permitted hopelessness to replace hope in the heart of another.

My apathy that may have stilled words and actions for justice in the lives of others.

O God, forgive us and create in us a new heart to build communities founded on acceptance.

Declaration of Forgiveness

We are all beggars.

Members of a species insufficient to itself.

We are all creatures plagued by unending doubts, ready to use anything and anyone for leverage.

But the outrageously good news is this: we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

Gloria TiS 140 v.5 John Henry Newman

Adoration, ay be given,

With and through the angelic host,

To the God of earth and heaven,

Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Peace *We greet each other with the words, "The peace of the Lord be with you" with the response "And also with you", or if from a distance, the hand over the heart, or the hands clasped.*

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

Readings

2 Samuel 1: 1, 17-27

The rhythm of readings in the Hebrew Bible have been centred these past weeks in the book of Samuel. In sum, the stories have traced David's rise and Saul's demise. Today, we hear that Saul and his son Jonathon have both been killed in battle against the Philistines. In this reading David laments their deaths, but it is a difficult tight rope that he walks. On the one hand, Saul was his lethal enemy, seeking to eliminate him from political contention. Jonathon on the other hand, was a close ally, a dear friend. What impresses in the reading is the genuine poignancy of the moment of loss, but also the way in which David has to negotiate the complex political situation, where the power he does not yet have could be turned on him. This is a tense personal and political moment. Much hangs upon it when it comes to both David's and Israel's future.

1After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.

¹⁷David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. ¹⁸(He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said: ¹⁹Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen! ²⁰Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult. ²¹You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more. ²²From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty. ²³Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. ²⁴O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. ²⁵How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. ²⁶I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. ²⁷How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Here Paul uses his armoury of language – terms such as grace and fellowship – to encourage the Corinthian Christian community to live generously, to develop a strong social ethic. For Paul, the same divine generosity that embraces us in our failure and brokenness, also generates action as we become God’s companions in grace. In other contexts, he speaks of something similar: fruits of the Spirit. So, his invitation of stewardship is not about moral obligations to pay God back as such, but rather, to engage with God in love in the world. Here Paul speaks of his collection for the poor of Judaea. He is always outwardly focused.

⁸Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. ⁸I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. ⁹For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ¹⁰And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— ¹¹now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. ¹²For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. ¹³I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

Hymn 661, Woman in the night, vs 1,2,3,5,6. Brian Arthur Wren 1936-

Gospel: Mark 5:21-43

This is a 'double-whammy': two stories about healing: the first, the woman with gynaecological difficulties, which are not only physically distressing, but more significantly, lead to her social rejection and scapegoating as constantly "impure"; and the story of the daughter of Jairus, who is given up as dead, and who, Jesus raises to life. While not directly about demons, as such, these stories are about the sentence of death imposed upon people, even in life, which is what the biblical language of demonology is all about. Note here also that we begin the reading with the image of the lake or sea (thalassa), which in the Hebrew mind always suggests fear and death: the Hebrews were not great sea-farers or swimmers.

²¹When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²²Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." ²⁴So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." ²⁹Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³²He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

³⁵While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" ³⁶But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" ⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

Homily

Hymn 164, The great love of God, Daniel Thambyrajah Niles 1908-70.

Prayers for the Church and World

Today we pray for the peoples of Kenya and Tanzania. We continue to persevere in prayer for the people of Gaza, Israel, Sudan, Ukraine and Russia.

*We offer the Bidding: Lord...**Hear our prayers.***

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

Offering

The congregation stands as the offering is received by the minister and prayers are offered over the gifts.

SENDING OUT

News and Notices

Sending Hymn 218, Jesus the name high over all, Charles Wesley 1707-88.

Commission and Blessing

Through Christ
we seek to read the signs of the times
with perception and discernment,
without fear or defensiveness, but with imagination and courage.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.

Our service has ended
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ

Postlude

Liturgist/Preacher: Rev'd Dr. Geoff
Reader: Bronwyn Brown
Music Coordinator: Jade McFaul
Flowers: Donna Davey

Some Anecdotal Theological Insights about Reality's Depth, Death and the Demons

Often when people think about the idea of demons, they think in personal terms; “the demons inside us”, “the demons that drive us to self-destruction”. Certainly, the New Testament when telling stories of “the demons” includes this understanding. But there is more to it than that. For the New Testament, the demons are located in the systems and structures that betray the designs of a life-giving God. They are impersonal spiritual realities at the centre of our personal and institutional lives that destroy life and justice.

Walter Wink, “The Powers that Be”

The beauty of the Gospel is this: that we are assured that evil does not reflect the fundamental nature of our world, leading us into a sense of fatalism and resignation. Rather, Jesus’ challenging of the demons and powers, assures us that the world is good and it is the job of humanity to build it accordingly.

José Ignacio González Faus, “Jesús y los demonios”