

Trinity 1, Proper 7 – 22 June 2025

Introduction and Call to Worship

Let us come together to worship, encouraged that we serve a God who brings light into even the darkest of places and welcomes us into his family of faith.

Today's Readings

First Reading Galatians 3:23-29

Paul explains that the Jewish Law had a temporary role that ended with Christ's coming. It brought awareness of sin, but not freedom from it; only Christ's death could do that.

Gospel Luke 8:26-39

Jesus has just crossed over the stormy Sea of Galilee into Gentile territory so that he can help one very troubled man.

Homily *"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." (Luke 8:35)*

Recently driving along the A11 on the way to visit family in Norwich, we passed a vast expanse of open-air pig huts – I pulled in at the layby to look at this incredible sight. The pigs roamed, freely around their enormous fields/enclosure, with their own tin huts for shelter and food in abundance. They looked clean, sociable and busy going about their daily routine. I paused to think about today's Gospel passage.

Often the things Jesus does fill us with joy – inspiration – hope, as his message is full of welcome for all! But for me, thinking about those poor pigs that rush down the hillside and drown, I am left saddened. And the people of the time were understandably enraged, as their roast dinner, their livelihood runs down the hillside and down before their very eyes, and they in response ask Jesus to leave.

This is not the kind of reception Jesus would have hoped for, but their dinner was dead at the bottom of the lake! As always with scriptural accounts, we need to look deeper to understand the real meaning. First of all, we may reflect upon the choice of Luke to talk of swine – or pigs, which we know the Jewish community don't usually eat. So perhaps the drowning of the swine means more than first meets the eye – perhaps they reflect something implying sin? Like in Baptism.

Context is important – Jesus has travelled from galilee to Gerasa, across the lake and the people were drawn to hear our Lord preach and teach – he inspired their lives and filled their hearts with anticipation. Just think for a moment, how you would have reacted to the stories that you have heard about Jesus, the healer, the miracle worker. This man of God makes the sick well, he returns sight to the previously blind and even stands up to the political class of his day! How would we describe Jesus?

Today's Gospel would give us lots to tell. We may find the talk of a demon-inhabited man among the tombs at Gerasa baffling - our understanding of human psychology and mental health has thankfully altered significantly from the first century and demon-possession is relegated to fanciful horror films. Today we hear of this challenged man's response when Jesus asks for his name – "Legion" he responds, and this is telling. Whatever he once was, his actual name - the most fundamental indicator of his identity – is now lost, so overwhelmed is he by foreign occupation.

It is hard for us to identify ourselves with the condition of this poor, unloved and rejected individual. We don't recognise his condition today in the same way. Yet "demons" of sorts are almost certainly still subtly embedded in our world. We no longer see them as foreign objects but as features of a familiar landscape. Like the distorting cells of a cancer, swamping healthy tissue, they gradually divert our

personalities from what they ought to be. What are your secret demons? Examples may include anger, prejudice, pride, bitterness and selfishness – all might qualify for “demon” status, along with many others, but we have become so comfortable and at home with them that we do not see how they damage or disfigure us.

Christians may more readily think of them as “sins”: the ingrained patterns of behaviour which spoil our relationship with God and with one another. Some sins or failings are obvious, others far more difficult to address. Sometimes we are blind to them – the things that somehow separate us from God and neighbour. Jesus, God among us, surprisingly touches the untouchable, and proves able to release the man from the elements which have enslaved him. He can do so because the man first recognises Jesus’ identity and secondly admits his own besieged state.

John the Baptist, whose birth is celebrated this week on 24th June, called people to repentance: a change of heart. Standing apart from the corrupting influence and seductive trappings of society, he asked his audience to be honest with themselves and with God, to re-evaluate the health of their very souls and to seek his help towards wholeness. Baptism, the symbolic cleansing in the Jordan’s waters was the means he used to mark the start of such a transformation in those who came to him. If individuals chose to open themselves to the power of God, the demons which had so subtly colonised them could begin to be neutralised.

When anyone is baptised into the faith of the Christian Church, they put themselves in the way of a transforming encounter. Recognising the “Son of the Most High God”, they begin a journey of faith which opens them to new possibilities – the kind of radical reconstruction which so frightens the onlookers in Luke’s Gospel, as Jesus removes “demons” from this social outcast and sends them racing down the hillside in a herd of Pigs to their death in the lake. At St James’ we celebrate baptism publicly – within the Eucharist or as a monthly service of Baptism, because the declarations by the candidates or their godparents are for all to hear and the welcome at the end is inclusive and ours to give as the whole family of faith!

Today’s Gospel leaves us with questions and turns some of our assumption’s upside down. Yet, in his action of healing, our Lord demonstrates that he can, with our cooperation, remodel and change us from within, to make us the glorious, “fully alive” human beings our creator intended – to take away, better still deal with our demons, whatever they may be. And goodness me doesn’t our world need such transformation right now.

Between surges of self-destructive energy, when we beat ourselves with virtual rocks and wrench at our mental chains, we may recognise one who simply asks our name, and in that stillness ask what he wants of us, knowing he will save us from the enemy within, bringing us real and genuine healing, restoration and liberation. At its heart, this is because Jesus welcomes us to be a part of something wonderful, his family of faith – whatever challenges we have. It is the lord who changes us, if we are willing and open to that challenge. Amen.

Fr Damian Harrison-Miles, June 2025.