

Rev'd Arrington Chambliss
Preached at St. John's, Jamaica Plain. MA
Luke 8: 26-39, Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you are our rock and redeemer; you are everything we have from the beginning to the end. Be with us as we preach and listen and sing and bring hope and resurrection and healing more fully into this place and the world. In Jesus name we pray Amen

Confronting the demons, Discovering True Self/Christ Self

The psalmist sings, Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?

She talked on the phone to her brother every day sometimes 3 times a day to make sure he had taken his medication and gotten out of bed; or sent another resume. He was still looking for a job after 9 months. And sometimes he got tired of looking and of being rejected. He would sleep more and he would stop picking up her calls and he'd say, remember I am mentally ill. The negative voices would get louder and louder in his head saying, "You're no good...you're worthless." And he wouldn't pick up the phone and, in those moments, even if he had, the phone would not have muffled the din in his head.

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?

She rarely left her home and never alone... she lived in fear most of the time... She'd overstayed her visa in Boston after her father and sister were kidnapped and tortured by the govt. Now she couldn't go home with her daughter. She was an exile in a place where some called her an "an illegal alien." She'd been an artist – a concert cellist in Port au Prince. She had had plans to go to college for music or art. but now she never left her home. And her life got smaller and smaller until she no longer recognized herself. And she swore she'd never play the cello again...

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?

All he could think about was the wine bottle in the bottom cabinet to the left of the kitchen sink. He had sworn to his partner the last time... the time he had forgotten to pick up the boys from school...the last time he'd promised. He'd cried his hands in his face... this will never happen again...I promise. But all he could think about was that bottle in the bottom cabinet to the left of the kitchen sink... sometimes it could stop that feeling, the pain... and he forgot to call his Sponsor... and he forgot his promise...and he opened the cabinet.

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?

His real name was almost forgotten, known only to a few and never spoken aloud, because he was the crazy homeless man with few clothes who smelled and lived in the graveyard. An outcast from his community. A man who called himself Legion, not because this was his family-given name, but because his identity had become the many demons, the legion of demons. But in Luke's Gospel today, the demons do not have the last word. Jesus walks right up to this man... and confronts the demons and casts them out and sends them into a pig herd and they jump into the sea and are drowned (you can't help but feel sorry for those pigs). And the man is restored to his right mind and to his community and to a new role as disciple... AND Jesus asks him to return to his home and declare how much God has done for him.

The Good News today is that Jesus has power over demons, the demons that all of us have in small and large ways. The demons that cast us down and disquiet our souls within us. The demons that wake us up at night. The demons that tell us we are not worthy. Or that our love for our partners is not sacred. Or that God doesn't love us. Or that all we are is our alcoholism or our mental illness, or social anxiety, our illness, our busyness, our pain, our work, the demons that strip us from our true identity and dignity as children of God as heirs of Abraham.

The Good News today is that Jesus points us to a new possibility... He walks up to each of us... and sees us our true selves... the true and beautiful and fabulous. He offers us the discovery of the true identity through him. We are revealed in our full stature in Christ. And when he does this amazing things begin to happen.... Demons are cast into the sea. We begin to find ourselves in the right mind and we don't open the bottom cabinet to the left of the kitchen sink, We are no longer imprisoned in our homes or our job. We begin to play the cello and do our art. We wake up and pick up the phone calls from our sisters and our sponsors and the calls of those who remind us again and again who we really are and that no matter what is happening in our lives that nothing, neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate anyone of us from the love of God that is in Christ. And gradually if we let ourselves believe this then and we begin to feel a little bit more of ourselves, and we sit up a little taller, and we walk out into the day clear that we belong. And divisions inside and outside of us won't have as much power anymore and we begin to know maybe even a little bit that we are all children of God through faith.

Now I speak about confronting demons as if it is easy.... I have the privilege of directing the Life Together: young adult diocesan internship program. For a year, 20 young adult interns (21-35 years of age) live in intentional community, serve (for 30/hrs a week) in social justice placements in churches and nonprofits and spend a day a week together in spiritual formation and training listening or God's call in their lives; cultivating authentic community and engaging in God's dream for justice, and healing in the world. In this past year in community, many demons have been confronted and amazing things have happened ... Rachael has discovered her voice; Natalie has found her passion; Caroline is no longer afraid to go to Dorchester; and Charlie has fallen in love with Lynn and urban ministry. It has required hard work... it has required showing up, it has required being present, it has required connecting with one another.

This is the invitation... and it is scary....but it is what it means to follow Jesus.If we confront our demons with God.'s truth and light guiding the way. If we allow Jesus to walk right up to us ... in the scariest and most hidden or shameful parts of our lives and to reflect back with love what he sees.... And then we begin to practice and remember and live this truth and we begin to reflect it to others and before we know it we might even find ourselves in our own Episcopal way proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for us.

AMEN