

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

June 24, 2007 –

Text: Luke 8:26-39

Pr. Robert Goldstein

“The Pig Thing”

This is the only Bible text I know where pigs fly –sort of, by rushing into a lake and drown. Not a great sight and not a particularly inviting text for the preacher! But there it is. The temptation immediately is to preach from the other texts assigned for the day. And they are good. The second lesson is right up Lutheran alley. But this preacher likes challenges –and with the pig thing, I’m going to stay!

I thought about those pigs all week. There are lots of unsatisfactory explanations of why Jesus sent the demons into those poor porkers, but I won’t bore you with them. The great Thomas Jefferson dropped the passage altogether in his version of the Bible. Not rational enough, I suppose. And me?.

Well, we get a cue from the people who witnessed this strange event. They asked Jesus to please leave! At least they had the sense that what Jesus did was truly beyond them. They were seized with great fear. “Please leave, Jesus! We don’t know what you did to this man, even though he is much changed for the better, but please leave because what you have done is beyond us! So leave!” And Jesus obliges.

So the pigs say to us, “Since when did it occur to us that living by grace, as we surely do, through faith in Jesus the Christ, since when did that mean that we would understand all mysteries of life and all of God’s ways?” There’s a lot we don’t know and will never know. So let’s be nourished on that pig thing thought.

“Please leave Jesus” is those ancient people’s honest way of communicating this truth that life is a great mystery. God is a great mystery. We too don’t know the whole mind of God – we can only know as much as Christ has revealed. And so beautiful is that which has been revealed! But there’s a whole lot more unrevealed to us.

But, more importantly, let’s move beyond the “pig thing” to what is clearly revealed indeed. And what is that? The humanity of the rest of the story. It is so extraordinary that as Jesus steps off the boat his greeter is a naked madman, possessed by demons, a legion of them. Now a Roman legion was composed of 6000 soldiers, so this poor man hears 6000 voices in his head, rendering him violent and dangerous to himself and to others so that he is chained to the tombs of the dead. Out of sight for the out of mind.

But with the strength of a legion somehow the poor man breaks his chains and today he greets Jesus stepping ashore. We also meet this man. We meet not a stick figure of homelessness

that we render invisible as we ply the streets of our city. We meet a human being in this story because Jesus greets him as a human being, worthy, more worthy than us, of his attention. We meet this man around 8:45 every Sunday morning in Fellowship Hall eating breakfast. We meet that woman everywhere in a culture that wants and encourages us to forget them. But Jesus greets that man and heals him. Again, once again, Jesus embraces the marginalized, those pushed out to society's edges of powerlessness.

Jesus does not walk by him or brush him off, but embraces him in their common humanity. It is in that broad, wide, deep and embracing humanity that turns Jesus into the Christ, the Beloved One of God. Through this amazing humanity grasp the divinity. For in such acts of unalloyed love God is fully revealed. In Jesus' embrace time heals the wounds so that by the time the townspeople come to investigate, they are stunned, stunned, to see that madman now dressed and calm at the feet of Jesus.

We, as a church of this Christ, a people of Jesus, are bearers of that same embrace that takes time to heal all who receive it. On this day of Gay Pride, this church has been an embracing healer, exorcising the demons of homophobia and guilt from the lives of many who then have been empowered to claim their wholeness.

With Pastor Dawn on board we will intensify our efforts to embrace the people of our streets and neighborhoods. But the pig thing is a welcome reminder that there is a lot we do not know and may never know. That should not discourage us, but empower us in the knowledge and conviction that we have received good news to share with others –a Gospel that ends living life in self-righteousness and despair and begins life living in such embracing love and liberation. As St. Paul says in the very same Spirit, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for all of you are in Christ Jesus."

As this Gospel reading shows so clearly this morning, Jesus treats everyone he meets as a person of fullest worth and a fellow child of God. May God grant us the grace to do likewise. Amen

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