



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Demons Within, Demons Without_ - The Second Sunday After Pentecost - 6_19_2022

In the name of the loving, liberating, and life giving God. Amen.

On its surface today, today's gospel can seem like another one of those fantastical miracle stories. The stories that can be kind of hard to relate to sometimes. Jesus doing supernatural things that only Jesus can do. Oh, and how about some demon possession and a Hollywood style exorcism to boot? How does any of this possibly relate to my life?

But whether you believe in demons or not, I think we can all agree that there are forces in this world that can utterly possess us. Fixations and obsessions that can consume our minds and Rob us of our agency. They can cause us to isolate from others, to even abuse ourselves and our bodies. Today's demons are all the forces within and without that dehumanize and oppress us, that keep us in conflict with ourselves and our community, that keep us estranged from one another and God. And they are indeed legion.

So what might be some of our demons today? It's been said that the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was to convince the world he didn't exist, to which I might add this corollary. The most insidious things that the demons within us can do is to make us believe they belong there. Today's demons can seem so commonplace that we can confuse their corrupting influence with just normal life. We can get accustomed to their constant presence in our minds, and we can confuse our occupied self with who we really are.

And so just as Jesus demands their name before casting them out, it's important for us to name some of ours as well. We can start perhaps with the obvious ones, things like alcohol or drug addiction. But how about that creeping habit we have around prescription drugs? What about everyday addictions that we don't talk much about? Stress eating food, materialism, compulsive shopping, sex, or pornography addiction. Do we suffer from unresolved trauma? Are we tormented by memories that keep us living in the past? Are we chained to a sad story about ourselves that we can't stop telling ourselves? Are we preoccupied with fear and anxiety about the future so that we can't live in the present?

Are we obsessed by our bodies, our looks, our clothes? Do we wander endlessly about the tombs of social media, looking for validation and affirmation? Are we slaves to the need to stay busy, to fill our days with events and happenings? Do we have a fear of not missing out and needing to keep up? Are we chained to the fear that we haven't done enough, that we haven't lived up to the

expectations of others? That we haven't worked hard enough or we haven't won God's favor? Are we haunted by the demons of doubt about whether God really loves us? About whether God really forgives us? About whether God's grace sounds too good to be true for me?

All of these and countless more are demons that are all too real and all too common. But as we see in the story today, the evil forces are not just at work within us. They are at work without as well. Our inner fear can drive us to demonize others. James Allison, our Theologian in Residence reminded us during his recent visit of the all too human habit, defined common ground with one another, not through understanding and not through forgiveness, but by finding a common enemy, somebody that we can laugh at and point fingers at. Someone that we can bully. Someone that we can blame so that we can feel innocent. Someone that we can call the problem so we don't have to address and consider real solutions. Someone that we can force out so that we can always feel in.

We do it because a common enemy has always been a shortcut to cooperation. Scapegoating brings us a sense of peace by distracting us from the true work of being together. And it works at least for a time, but it is always a false piece because it is a piece without justice. It is a piece based not on reconciliation, but on separation, not in humility, but in judgment, not in surrender and not in transformation. It is a piece that is not based in Christ, but on the othering of one of God's very own. And so it is a piece that ultimately breeds more violence and a cycle of estrangement, resentment, and revenge.

Can we think of some of the scapegoats throughout history? Jews, Palestinians, Christians, the Irish, blacks, Muslims, illegal immigrants, refugees, the homeless, interracial couples, LGBT folks, divorced people, women in the workplace, Republicans, Democrats, people that we disagree with politically so we don't have to work collaboratively, as Father Bill invited us to do over the weekend. Once again, the list of those that we have found ways to other is legion.

And if you think I may be reading a bit too much into this simple little story of the town crazy, look no further than the conclusion for a telltale sign of scapegoating, because when the man is healed of his demons, and he is found clothed and sitting at the feet of Jesus, did you notice how the village responded? Did the crowd rejoice? Did they shout Hosanna? Were they filled with hope? No, they were afraid.

And notice they had never been afraid of the man before. There's nothing in the text that he was dangerous or would hurt anyone. They just needed to keep him in his place. And so long as he stayed at a distance, everything was fine. They are afraid now because without asking Jesus had rehumanized their boogeyman and they would now have to face their shame, that the town crazy that they had undoubtedly blamed their sins on, had been one of them all along. Just another

scared, broken human being in need of compassion and healing, just like the rest of us.

And notice too, when they discovered who healed him, they become afraid of Jesus as well. They don't drop to worship Him. Nobody is reaching out to grab His robes and the hope that they might be healed. Nobody is asking him to come to the village to heal their sick daughter. No. Having seen what he had done to their scapegoat. They now turn on him and try to cast him out as well. Because the last thing any of us ever wants is to have our scapegoats revealed to us, revealed to us as one of us. It upsets our status quo. It challenges our self righteousness. It upends all of the categories that we try to put people in.

I experienced this firsthand at a megachurch. Years ago in Southern California, they were holding a debate about gay marriage, pro and con. And this stadium-like church, it was filled to the rafters with opponents. Wasn't even close. And toward the end, somebody from the crowd took the mic and he said something like this. He said, "You know, I am just sick and tired of that whole gay agenda. Will you people just keep it to yourselves?" And there was this huge cheer that erupted in that arena. Like he had just said the thing that was on all of their minds. And then one of the panelists on the pro side stood up and very calmly says, "Let me tell you about the gay agenda. It is my husband, Dave and I trying to get to bed by 9:30 because we have crazy bills and we have to be at work early. And once we're in bed, we try to catch a little of Desperate Housewives, but invariably get into an argument about who forgot to let the cat out."

And there was this silence that filled that arena, like the air had just been sucked out by this story, this familiar, relatable story, this picture that had just been painted. And you could just see in that silence that for a moment, at least, he had managed to rehumanize what had been for them a nameless and faceless boogeyman.

Who are our scapegoats today? Who gets you angry? Who do you blame for the country's problems? Who do you hope your children never marry or never grow up to be anything like? Who do you wish would just leave so that we might have peace? Naming those we demonize is not easy. By definition, they are either invisible to us, or we have convinced ourselves they deserve it. But as Allison reminded us, the sure sign that you have a scapegoat is believing that you don't have a scapegoat.

But like naming the demons that are within us, it's a first step towards healing, and healing there will be. Because whatever the chaos of our life, whatever demons torment us from within or without, at the feet of Jesus, they have no power. At the feet of Jesus, we come to ourselves once more. And it is from the feet of Jesus that we are sent, sent to heal those who once oppressed us, to heal our former captors, to forgive our bullies, to love our former enemies.

Notice in the story today, filled with gratitude, the man wants nothing more than to follow and go along with Jesus. But Jesus instead sends him back to minister to the very people who had once forsaken him. Not to return in anger or retribution, but as a forgiving victim. So that with his very life he might show them a new way of being together. This is not a story about the supernatural power of Jesus, but of the power he gives all of us in our choices.

Will we return to our bullies as the forgiving victim? Will we show our oppressors the compassion and the forgiveness that we had been denied? Will we surprise them with our love and our mercy and in so doing show them a better way? Or will we go to shame and rebuke them or worse, join them as they turn their attention to yet another scapegoat? And when the tables are turned, when we are members of the community, will we welcome those that we once cast out? Will we be open to seeing their restored humanity? Will we have the humility to ask their forgiveness or will we just find another reason to cast them out and crucify them once more?

The story ends on a kind of cliffhanger because it's our story as well. How will it end for you? Will we name the demons within us that keep us from one another? Will we accept the healing that comes at the feet of Christ? Will we find the courage to name those that we demonize? And will we be willing to go to the tombs, to learn their name and to find our humanity in theirs until the day comes when there is no longer Jew or Greek? When there is no longer slave or free? No male, no female, no black, no white, no gay or straight, no transgendered, no cisgendered, no housed, no homeless, no documented, no undocumented, no east side and no west side, no suburban, no urban, no red state and no blue states - when we are one, one in Christ Jesus.

Amen.