

# IN HIS RIGHT MIND, AT LAST

Pentecost IV – June 20, 2010 + 1 Kings 19:1-15a + Psalm 42 and 43 + Galatians 3:23-29 + Luke 8:26-39

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*The townspeople found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.*

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All four gospels of the Christian tradition contain stories of Jesus bringing healing to individuals possessed by demons. Only in the Gospel of Luke does this particular episode appear.

There is a city, and there is a man of that city. We are told that the man is possessed by demons – that is demons with an ‘s’ – in the plural. So many demons in fact that they call themselves Legion. This man of the city did not actually live in the city. He was considered unclean due to his demons. As a result he was kept in chains, bound and in shackles. Although at times he apparently was so overtaken by the demons that he could break loose from his bonds – and then run around the countryside, naked.

Like all demons – they recognize Jesus immediately – as soon as Jesus stepped out of boat and onto dry land, the Gospel tells us. “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me” The demons begged Jesus not to order them to go back into the abyss. And so, being an accommodating fellow, Jesus agrees to instead

send them – not back into the abyss – but rather into a nearby herd of pigs.

It seems that even the swine wanted nothing to do with this legion of demons, as they promptly stampede down the pasture, run into a lake, and drown. All and all, this reads like a pretty standard story about the healing of a demon possessed man. Until the people of the village show up. This is where Luke displays his genius in story telling.

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*The townspeople found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.*

And then the four words that are the lynchpin of the entire enterprise.

*And they were afraid.*

They were afraid because the balance or equilibrium of the village ‘system’ rested upon the village’s need for the demoniac to be the scapegoat – the ‘holder’ all the pain, all the misery, all of the hate, all of the emotional sickness of the village.

We have already been told that he is a man of the city, yet did not live in a house, but in the tombs.

We have already been told that he usually lives bound in chains and shackles, under guard.

Who do you suppose paid for the chains? Who held him down as the shackles were hammered

into place between his ankles and his knees?  
Who were the people who stood guard?

This man of the city was exactly where the city wanted him to be. Exactly where they *needed* him to be. As long as he was denied the right to live in his own home, so long as he was relegated to the tombs, so long as he was bound and kept in chains & shackles, then, the city was safe.

But it wasn't an issue of being safe from the man possessed by a Legion of demons. We aren't told that he was dangerous. We aren't told that he stole things, of ravaged the womenfolk. In fact what we are told, is that on those occasions when he could break loose from his chains and shackles, that he went into the countryside. Not into the city to cause trouble, but into the countryside.

The city wanted – needed – this fellow to be bound and chained up. Their entire system of denial and hypocrisy demanded it. We know this – because when they saw the man sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, *they were afraid*.

We aren't told that they were angry because of the dead pigs. They didn't ask Jesus to provide recompense for their lost investment in the swine herd. We aren't told anything about the swineherds going on strike or initiating a labor action demanding their lost wages. We are told that when they saw the man clothed and in his right man, that they were afraid. They asked Jesus to leave, because they were struck with great fear.

Their entire way of life had just been upended. The demoniac – the holder of the village's pain

and hurt and secrets and sickness – was now in his right mind. And they wanted nothing to do with that. And nothing to do with this Jesus person who had caused the problem.

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This is a story from the Gospel of Luke that has been 'ripped from the headlines' in our church today.

After over 30 years of discernment, prayer, debate, studies, dialogue, pain, commissions, and reports, The Episcopal Church has found itself becoming less and less confused, and more and more in its right mind.

As a national church, we are coming to the point where we understand that our baptismal promise to respect the dignity of every human being, includes – EVERY HUMAN BEING. Including those who are lesbians, gay, transgendered or bisexuals.

And like the man formerly known as Legion, when some parts of the Anglican Communion look at us, now coming into our right minds, they are afraid. Some parts of the Anglican Communion, especially at this point the Archbishop of Canterbury, are struck with great fear.

They have been very happy over the years to find The Episcopal Church bound in the metaphorical chains and shackles of hypocrisy and silence. As long as we acted like well behaved WASPS and bought into the original 'don't ask don't tell' policy of LGBT people in the church, everything was fine.

But once we began to become whole, once the legion of demons began to be to exorcised from our church's psyche and conscience, all hell broke loose.

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We are at a watershed moment in the Anglican Communion.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has taken the extraordinary step of removing the American church from participation in certain international bodies that he controls. For other international Anglican groups over which he does not exercise complete control, he has publicly called upon The Episcopal Church to absent themselves.

He is desperately trying to find those chains and shackles and put The Episcopal Church back where it appears that he wants us. Back outside the city. Naked, bound, chained, shackled, and above all, guarded at all times. If he can do that, then balance will be restored. The system will regain equilibrium, and all will be right with the world.

The situation is slowly dissolving into the ridiculous. This past month our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori was invited to a Cathedral in London. Prior to granting permission for her to take part in the liturgy, news reports tell us that the Archbishop's office asked for documentary evidence that she had in fact been ordained a Deacon, Priest, and Bishop.

The Archbishop's office next said, in effect, "when we do give you permission, you may not wear your miter inside the Cathedral. All of the male bishops can wear their miters – but you can't wear yours."

Now in my opinion, the church could do away with every miter in Christendom. But . . . if the boys get to wear theirs, then the girls should get to wear theirs.

When asked later for her take on the situation, the PB had this response: "She called the requirements "nonsense" and said, "It is bizarre; it is beyond bizarre.'" But, being the good Anglican that she is, she complied with the demands and walked in the procession into the cathedral with her miter folded under her arm.

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The Archbishop's office has stated that the growing diversity within the Communion is a problem. In The Episcopal Church, we have a theology that says the growing diversity within the Communion is a gift from God.

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*They found him sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.*

The people of the village were right to be afraid. The demoniac had met Jesus and been made whole. The Archbishop of Canterbury is also right to be afraid. The Episcopal Church in America has dared to loosen its chains and shackles. We have promised to strive for justice and peace for all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being.

I pray to God that we do not lay down those promises and pick back up the chains and shackles that formerly bound us. I don't believe that we will. I do believe that there will be more nonsense and beyond bizarre behavior coming from Canterbury.

I bid you to pray for the Church, for our Presiding Bishop Katherine and for the President of the House of Deputies, Bonnie Anderson. For all in our church who are engaged in leadership at the international level, that as they are shunned, dis-invited and made to feel unwelcome, that they will know the grace and peace of God that surpasses our human understanding.

I bid your prayers for Mark, our Bishop, and for Catherine, our Bishop Suffragan, as they provide leadership to our diocese as we strive to live into the mission and vision of the church entrusted to us here in the diocese of New York.

And finally I bid your prayers for our parish. That our mission and vision for ministry in Poughkeepsie will continue to grow and mature. That we might continue to bring the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our neighborhood and community.

And that at the last day, we too might be found, clothed, in our right minds, and sitting at the feet of Jesus.