



“When Pigs Fly”

Second Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, June 22-23, 2019
All Services
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 65:1-9; Psalm 22:19-28;
Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

On Tuesday I returned from my motorcycle trip down to Austin, Texas to visit my daughter, eight states, 3,275 miles, four states of barbeque, Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas and the Republic of Texas. The best barbecue I had was actually the first one, it was the *Flying Pig* in Crossville, Tennessee, off of route 40. Someone after the first set of services said, “You know, if pigs could fly, how good would those wings be?” It is a really good thought! I love pork barbeque! So, I ordered a pulled pork sandwich and they made it nice and chunky, just the way I like it. They didn’t put the sauce on, they let me do that myself and they even sold the ribs by one at a time so you could just try one. It was really absolutely fantastic.

You know, we always haven’t always been able to enjoy pork barbecue as Christians. Early Christians were forbidden following the kosher laws of the Jewish tradition. Pigs after all, were considered unclean animals, ritually unacceptable both for sacrifice as well as for meals. Contact even with a pig would make one unclean, ritually impure so that you wouldn’t be able to participate in the religious rituals of the synagogue or the temple. It was a religion that was based on an outward purity before God.

But lucky for me, and lucky for you – in the Book of Acts, St. Peter has a dream where God tells him *pulled pork is back on the menu!* And many other things as well. I hope you enjoy those crab cakes, they’re all good.

And Jesus discussing hand washing and ritual purity with the Pharisees rightly points out that it’s not the exterior but the interior purity and spiritually that really matter to God. God cares about your heart inclination towards him, not so much about what your wearing, although you look beautiful today, or how you take communion, or what music you like to listen to. Is your heart generous toward God?

And Jesus wanting to share God’s heart and love with the world, will do anything, he will go anywhere to make that happen. Jesus will even break down the purity and kosher traditions of his Jewish faith for the sake of love.

The writer of our gospel Luke, who is a Gentile by birth, considered an outsider, loves telling the stories of Jesus’ boundary crossings. In the eighth chapter, Jesus crossed the

Sea of Galilee to go the region of the Gerasenes, a non-Jewish, Gentile area. Considered by many to be unclean.

As soon as he lands, he is immediately confronted by a man who has lots and lots of issues. First, he's walking around naked in a very conservative and religious culture. Secondly, he's alone, he's separated from family and friends and community. And of course, there are the purity issues, and there are two of them. One he's living among tombs among human remains, and if that's not bad enough, there are pigs walking all around. To top it off, he is possessed by demons, not one, not two, not three. When Jesus asks him what his name is, he responds "Legion." He's no longer Bob or Jim, or Fred, the demon has given him a new name, that of Legion. And Legion isn't even actually a name, it's a number, it's a unit of the Roman army of about 3-6000 soldiers.

I discovered a good illustration of what must have been going through this man at dusk in Austin near the Ann Richardson Bridge in downtown Austin. When they built the bridge, migratory bats figured out a way to get into the super structure so that between May and September they come out of their hiding as the sun begins to set. Swarms of thousands and thousands of these bats. We have a phrase that if you have bats in the belfry that you're considered crazy. Here you have bats in the bridge.

This man with thousands of voices in his head has lost his individuality and his freedom. Everything that he once knew is gone, his personality, his community, his family, his dignity, his very self has been replaced by an army of demonic anti-life forces. All that is left of him is a colony of conflicting forces. Evil has taken over his life and spirit.

Now for modern ears, I have to admit that this is a pretty dramatic story, I mean after all, we don't talk about demonic possession very often. But if you really think about it, people go through this all the time, that idea of competing voices in our heads. We're confronted with a multitude of temptations, we experience a war of the negative, hurtful thoughts and actions, and it's easy for us to lose self-control. Think about that teenager who wants acceptance and joins the wrong crowd or maybe even worse and, in that way, they lose a part of themselves. Or people who turn to drugs and alcohol to lessen the pain that they are experiences in life. Or the evil forces at work in our world in which there is proclivity of violence and inhumanity to neighbor and friend alike. Or even the commercialism and greed that we experience in advertising where we are told that all sorts of products will make us happier. Voices in our heads.

Overwhelmed by concern it's easy to lose yourself. Sometimes we don't even know why we're confused or angry or upset. Maybe you want to do the right thing, but you find yourself pulled again and again into the same destructive patterns. Alone, rejected, dejected, you find yourself surrounded by death and a sense of unworthiness.

Then Jesus shows up on your shore and sets you free. Jesus confronts and defeats the power of evil and sin. Jesus restores you to freedom and dignity. Jesus gives you a new name and a new identity.

In Luke's story Jesus just doesn't cast out his demons and sent them on their way, he doesn't just alleviate his condition, he turns them into a disciple where he sits at the feet of Jesus to learn from him, where he's opened up to a new and bright future.

But as we see with the pigs literally flying off the cliff into the sea below in our story, the process is never a very clean or easy one. Expelling evil from our world always involves sacrifice.

Recently the world celebrated the 75th Anniversary of D-Day. The world remembered a generation the greatest generation, who paid the ultimate sacrifice to cast out evil on the shore of Normandy and bring freedom to a whole continent.

Expelling evil from our world always involves sacrifice. On the cross, evil, sin and death are cast out and defeated by Jesus. On the cross Jesus shows up giving his very life for the world, for you and for me and sets us free. On the cross you and I see that God understands the pain and the suffering that we go through in life and he will never let that be the end of our story.

Some people though won't be happy with our freedom and new life in Christ.

When Jesus disrupts the status quo people can become afraid. Notice how the people living near the man possessed by demons gets scared and asks Jesus to leave. They are unable to celebrate this new life that their friend and neighbor has who was lost and now is found, who was in bondage to evil and now lives in freedom. They just beg for Jesus to leave, even as the man begs to stay with Jesus and to go with him.

The freed from the forces that bound him, he is now a child of God through faith, and he goes to proclaim the goodness of God in Jesus to his neighbors in spite of their reluctance.

To all those who find themselves in bondage, to all those who find those competing voices in their head, Jesus sets us free. Call upon him and be released and follow. And now go, go to love God and to love people. Go with your stories of faith and restoration and declare how much God has done for you. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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