

Sunday 19th June 2016 (3rd Sunday ~ Healing Service). Gospel Reading: Luke 8:26-39

'The Cosmic Craftsman' (1348 words)

***May all I say and all we think be in harmony with you, God within, God beyond, God of all wisdom.***

***Amen.***

It seems fitting that today's Gospel reading, often referred to as 'The Healing of the Gerasene Demoniac' or 'The Miracle of the Gadarene Swine', coincides with the third Sunday of the month when members of our healing team offer prayers for healing and wholeness here in the Beauchamp Chapel.

As we've heard, in this narrative Jesus meets a man from the town of Gerasa, or Gadara, depending on which gospel you're reading. He is a naked, crazed and broken man; possessed by demons, alienated from his family and marginalised by his community. In an act of compassion, and in acknowledgment of the man's humanity and personhood, Jesus asks him his name and, by inference, gives him the opportunity to recount his story. Jesus proceeds to banish the demons into a herd of pigs that promptly hurl themselves off the edge of the hillside and drown in the lake beneath. The man, liberated from the torment of the demons, is healed and sits quietly at Jesus feet, restored to wholeness. He asks to go with Jesus but, freeing him to re-join his family and to reintegrate into his community, Jesus tells him to go home and to tell them what God has done for him. With this gift he can begin to heal the bonds of familial and communal kinship.

In biblical times demons were believed to be malevolent spiritual beings, sometimes said to be fallen angels cast out of the presence of God, who can possess, persecute and torment us, tempt us to engage in immoral practices or cause us to develop physical or mental illnesses. I'll be very honest with you, there is nothing that I have experienced or lived through in my own life that has led me to accept the tangible reality of demons in this biblical sense of the word, although I recognise that there are those who do acknowledge the veracity of such phenomena. Nevertheless, it is patently obvious that we each carry with us our own personal demons in the form of traumas, conflicts or the emotional and psychological wounds formed by the inevitable turbulence we each experience throughout the arc of our lives. When Jesus asks the demoniac's name, he replies 'Legion' reminding us that there are many different ways in which conflict and disturbance can manifest in our lives. There are a myriad of ways that we can be overwhelmed and tormented; a myriad of ways in which we can be fractured, fragmented and uprooted. We need to personally and collectively recognise and acknowledge such personal demons in order to begin the journey to healing and wholeness. If we are to kill the demons, we first have to name them.

As is often the way with the Bible, we are presented here with a story that can be understood in at least two different ways. It could be taken literally as an historical event, or it can be understood as metaphor or allegory and interpreted for its rich symbolic meaning. We could simply read this account as an event that really happened some 2000 years ago, but the problem I have with this sort of literal-historical interpretation is that it minimises the meaning, impact and significance of the story for us today. If what we have is a literal and historical account of a 2000 year old divine miracle, how then can we, as human beings living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

relate to it? How can we learn from it? How can we grow as a consequence of it? Now, I don't think that it's a coincidence that immediately before this story we read the account of Jesus rebuking the wind and the turbulent waters to calm the storm, and that immediately after it we hear about the healing of the woman who had suffered from a haemorrhage for twelve years and of Jairus's daughter who is restored to life. For me, these accentuate the symbolic meaning of the healing of the demoniac, the stories are intertwined. Jesus, should we chose to follow him, shows us the way to calm our inner storm, to address our personal demons, to 'go in peace' after years of suffering and to be restored to life in all its fullness. The Benedictine monastic Macrina Wiederkehr, reflecting on the story of the woman with the issue of blood<sup>1</sup>, explains that 'all we need to do is to approach Jesus bleeding and believing. The hem will be enough for touching'. The fractured shards of our human lives can be restored, our brokenness can be healed.

There is in Japan a craft known as Kintsugi. It is the Japanese art of restoring broken pottery and ceramics using a lacquer resin containing powdered precious metals, often gold. At the end of the process the resin is burnished so that it looks like the repair has been made with solid gold. Indeed, the word Kintsugi means 'golden joinery' or 'golden seams'.

Its origins are thought to date back to the 15th century when the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa sent a cherished Chinese tea bowl that had been broken back to China to be repaired. Upon its return, he was saddened to see that the repair had been made with ugly metal staples so he asked his Japanese craftsmen to find a more complimentary and pleasing repair process. Kintsugi was the outcome.

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<sup>1</sup> *Wiederkehr, M (1991) Seasons of Your Heart: Prayers and Reflections*

This inspired process makes no attempt to conceal the brokenness of the vessel. The repair is intentionally visible and the vessels 'wounds' are incorporated into the aesthetic of the restoration which becomes artistically 'better than new'. Once restored in this way, the beauty and preciousness of the repaired vessel is considered greatly enhanced by having been broken and visibly made whole again. The history of the object is recognised, respected and cherished.

This speaks to me of *our* brokenness, and of *our* ability to be restored. Humanity, it seems to me, is characterised by brokenness. Each one of us is broken in ways that are sometimes similar but often unique; we each have our own personal demons. But, whatever form it takes, our brokenness, which should never be considered as weakness, is not the end of the story. If we embrace our brokenness and work on it with treasure within us, the infinite mystery of the Divine who makes 'everything beautiful in its time' (Ecclesiastes 3:11), we can be made whole once more. And, following our restoration, we are *more* precious, *more* valuable for having been broken and made whole again. Like the broken pot lovingly mended by the Kintsugi craftsman, our brokenness is not erased or reversed, we cannot return to a time before it occurred and we can no longer be as we once were. But we are *more* as a consequence, not less, and our 'golden joinery' becomes the visible expression of our journeying towards personal healing and wholeness.

God is the Cosmic Craftsman who 'heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds' (Psalm 147:3). So, when we are restored by the resinous balm of the Cosmic Craftsman, we too are transformed into something infinitely more beautiful and our 'golden seams' can become the burnished gold that helps to heal others.

I'd like to finish by conflating the words of two very different voices, that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American priest and author Brennan Manning and the 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet and Sufi mystic Rumi. Together they said this...

'In a futile attempt to erase our past, we deprive the community of our healing gift. If we conceal our wounds out of fear and shame, our inner darkness can neither be illuminated nor become the light for others'<sup>2</sup>. 'If you knew yourself for even one moment, if you could just glimpse your most beautiful face, maybe you wouldn't slumber so deeply in that house of clay. Why not move into your house of joy and shine into every crevice! For you are the secret Treasure-bearer, and always have been'<sup>3</sup>.

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Brennan Manning From *'Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging'*.

<sup>3</sup> Rumi