

6-19-16

For Orlando Luke 8:26-39

First today I bring to Orlando, and us words of support and comfort from people all over the world. After the news of the shooting people on our ship and in the cities we visited shared their own shock and grief with us when they discovered we were Floridians. Make no mistake, a vast majority of the people in the world are praying for and standing beside Orlando.

Second, I want to share that I at first, wanted to change our scripture for today, but reconsidered, because though the initial situation described is very different - a healing versus a mass shooting, the people's reaction is instructive to us as we struggle with how to deal with this horrific event. In our reading, Jesus helps a very troubled and tormented man. This man, who everyone knew, who was probably related to many in the area, was released from the torment of some horrific mental or spiritual illness. He was fine, he was as the scripture says, "in his right mind again." And when the people of the area saw that he was healed... when they realized that Jesus had freed him, they did not throw a party, they did not rejoice, instead they became afraid and asked Jesus to leave town. "Don't let the door hit you on the way out."

There is something in us that reacts with fear, certainly when things like the shooting up of a night club, but we humans fear even when huge miraculous good things happen too. We like to have our world ordered, our situation predictable. And this Jesus going around healing people, changing lives, that is not order, but chaos. Now to be fair, we must know that under Roman rule, exorcists - those who cast out demons - were outlawed in that area, because they had power. And Jesus in casting out the demon named "Legion" - the word used only for a Roman cohort of soldiers - is making a bit of a political statement. So it was not without basis that the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave. He was a person who stirred the pot, a trouble-maker.

But as writer Nicholas Berdyaev reminds us, "Fear is never a good counsellor." Imagine what gifts, what joys, what further healing and love and good news Jesus could have brought to them, if he had been allowed to stay. But their fear got the best of them.

Fear is what terrorists like ISIS want us to feel, because they know fear will make us unable to make good decisions. Henry David Thoreau once wrote, "nothing is so much to be feared as fear." In his classic work of science fiction, *Dune*, Frank Herbert reminds us that "Fear is the mind killer." Fear is a powerful and usually inappropriate master. Except in those rare cases of true physical danger, fear is one of the worst basis for any decision. But it is the basis of the action of that young man in Orlando. Hatred, prejudice, war and violence are all children of one parent, fear. The people of ISIS fear the wonderful people of this world, other religions, and other ways of life. And for them this fear that they somehow are at risk just because people live differently than they would, has grown into a monstrous demon that drives them to do the most horrific things.

In the face of this horror we must decide what will determine our course. Will it be fear? Some would say that is logical, reasonable, but the writer of 1st John challenges us with these words about God's great love for us, writing "there is no fear in Love, but perfect love casts out fear."

As we wrestle with our pain and hurt, the scriptures assure us that in the face of such tragedy lamentation is needed. With the Psalmist we cry out to God angrily asking "why does evil triumph causing good people to suffer?" Likewise we, in deep sorrow and mourning, can

join the psalmist who writes “tears have been my food day and night.” Certainly we can let the Orlando shooting move us, inspire us to work beside others for peace and justice and love in the world. But friends we must not react with fear. “Fear is never a good counselor,” writer Nicholas Berdyaev wrote, “and victory over fear is the first spiritual duty of man.”

As we move ahead together let us lament and let us weep. Let us work to eradicate heterosexism and homophobia. Let us work for more help for those like the man in the Gospel who suffer from mental illness. Let us move forward with love with people of all faiths to seek justice. And let us with faith, and not fear, move forward remembering God’s love for us and for all people. AMEN

Luke 8:26-39

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me”— for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they 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. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.