

The Reverend Paula Whitacre

**Sermon June 19 2022 - The Gospel of Luke Chapter 8 verses 26
through 39.**

I want to offer a reflection on the significance of this day. The third Sunday in June is officially celebrated as Fathers Day. So happy Fathers Day to everyone who is a father in the conventional sense of the word, as well as to those who have fathered others. The History channel has a short note about the origins of this day. Early in the 1900's various states designated specific days to honor male parents the equivalent to Mothers day. In 1972 the day honoring fathers became a nationwide holiday much to the joy of retailers.

Father's Day can be both a celebratory and a painful Sunday. For those whose male ancestors who have passed on, others celebrating this day can be a painful reminder of their loss. For those who have been abused by male relatives or by their male significant other it can be a day of shame and hurt. For some it may be another symbol of the patriarchy, an unwelcome symbol of power and oppression, for those in any society where all voices are not heard and respected.

The images of serving dad breakfast in bed, giving dad a tie or taking him out to dinner is the image advertisers would have you believe.

While this image is true for some it is not true for all.

“Monday we will celebrate Juneteenth, June 19th. The

Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham

Lincoln on January 1, 1863, had established that all

enslaved people in Confederate states in rebellion against

the Union “shall be then, thenceforward, and forever

free.”

But in reality, the Emancipation Proclamation didn’t

instantly free any enslaved people. The proclamation only

applied to places under Confederate control and not to

slave-holding border states or rebel areas already under

Union control. However, as Northern troops advanced into

the Confederate South, many enslaved people fled behind

Union lines.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox Court House two months earlier in Virginia, but slavery had remained relatively unaffected in Texas—until U.S. General Gordon Granger stood on Texas soil and read General Orders No. 3: “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.”

Juneteenth honors the end to slavery in the United States and is considered the longest-running African American holiday. On June 17, 2021, it officially became a federal holiday. “

Our president Joe Biden states: Juneteenth is a day of profound weight and power.

A day in which we remember the moral stain and terrible toll of slavery on our country -- what I’ve long called America’s original sin. A long legacy of systemic racism, inequality, and inhumanity.

157 years have passed since June 19, 1865 and yet many in this country are still bound by the chains of oppression – maybe physically, emotionally or spiritually. The Gospel reading from Luke this morning has Jesus breaking chains of oppression.

It tells the story of Jesus and his encounter with the demon possessed man in Garasene. In order to more fully understand the nuances, we will explore a little of the back story to this scripture first, then move forward into what the spirit might have us take from this reading into our lives and community.

The beginning of chapter 8 tells of Jesus going through the villages and cities, proclaiming the Good News of the of the kingdom of God. There is a side note about the women who followed Jesus providing for him and his disciples out of their resources. He tells parables and stories, teaching the disciples and crowds who follow

him. Told that his mother and family are trying to reach him, Jesus says in v 21 my mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. That is what creates the community and binds it together.

Jesus tells his disciples they are going to the other side of the lake and a storm whips up. His disciples call to him and Jesus rebukes the wind and waves and calm follows.

Jesus asks where is your faith? We read in v 25 the disciple were afraid and amazed who is can command winds and water? The disciples were afraid..hang on to that because fear plays in role in what happens next.

The boat lands in the country of the Gerasenes, opposite Galilee, across the lake. For Luke's Jesus, this is the only time he ventures out of Israelite territory.

Marion L. Soards explains Jews were and are prohibited from eating pork but the pigs were raised for the large

Gentile population that lived in sections of Palestine. It is a ritually unclean environment for the Jewish Jesus. The demonic that Jesus encounters is also ritually unclean for he lives among the tombs.

This poor unnamed man has been isolated from his community because of the demons., none can live near him, chains and restraints cannot hold him. The image the author tries to create is one who is as good as dead.

Falling at Jesus feet, he reveals Jesus' identity as the Son of the Most high God. The demons know who Jesus is.

Jesus asks the man his name and he replies Legion. The word legion is the technical term of a division of the Roman army, roughly around 5000 men. It brings forth images of Roman power, indicative of the spiritual battle Jesus is in.

The demons beg Jesus to allow them to leave the man and go into the swine heard grazing on the hillside. The demons enter the pigs who promptly rush down the hillside into the lake and drown. Poor pigs.

The watching swineherds are terrified and they run off into the community with this story. Coming back, they find the demonic man in his right mind, clothed and talking to Jesus.

This situation installs great fear for the residents of the community and they ask Jesus to leave. The man Jesus has healed begs to go with Jesus be Jesus asks him to stay, return home and proclaim what God has for you. He become part of Jesus' family as he hears God's word and does it. Perhaps he is the first disciple to the Gentiles of that region.

What do you think the Garesens were afraid of?

Rev Dr. Cheryl Lindsay notes: The Garesenes

were afraid when they recognized that Jesus had the ability to change circumstances most notably for the better.

Dr. Allen Culpepper notes that the people “recognize the mystery and the power of what has taken place, but they cannot make a place for it or accommodate their lives to. Their response is to ask Jesus to leave.

So what might we take away from this scripture?

I would suggest this: It took courage for Jesus to go into an area where he might not be welcome and most assuredly would violate the Jewish religious laws of purity. Jesus unconcernedly crossed boundaries whether they were geographical, metaphorical or religious.

He was not bound by cultural or social convictions. He was concerned about the health of one person he encountered.

This one person, now in his right mind, would witness to the love and healing that cured him. That healing caused fear in the community.

Where in the Jewish communities Jesus traveled, he was asked to stay, here he was asked to leave.

Why? Maybe they were not ready. Change the status quo is threatening.

Marge and I spent time engaging with the local PFlag group in Bel Air.

PFLAG is parents and friends of lesbians and gays. Some of the members were transgendering. Their parents and some grandparents were there to learn about the process and how to support them in their journey. The members there were very suspicious of our presence as Marge am openly Christian. That may sound strange until one considers that folks that we were with have been demonized for years by the institutional church, many by their families and their local church. They've been kicked out of house and home, shunned by communities until they too find themselves homeless, maybe sleeping

among the tombs themselves, without food, medical attention, or proper clothing.

The PFLAG meeting was a place of love, and of acceptance. For my part, I would introduce myself, my identity as a lesbian and as a Christian. I could see the fear in the kids eyes. And I would apologize as a minister of the Christian Church for the harm that has been done to them by this institution. I would tell them they are created in God's image and are loved and there are churches, even in the Harford county where they would be welcomed. You and I know not all churches do.

Not sure everyone believed me. The best Marge and I could hope to do was keep showing up and witness their pain. In return they were able to witness our love of God and our desire to be a light in a dark world.

I encourage you, beloved of Christ, to take steps into uncharted territory where you may not be welcome, but that the light of Christ's love is desperately needed. Intentionally interact with those the church describes as outcasts, hang out with sinners, accept that you may only get the chance to plant seeds. Shed your chains and walk

beyond the conventional social, political and cultural boundaries
where there may be people waiting to meet you and listen to the Good
News you bring.

May it be so.