

Hello, and welcome to this short time of reflection and prayer from the Wirksworth Team Ministry. I'm Canon David Truby Rector of the Team, and it's my privilege to offer you this message for the First Sunday after Trinity.

We will begin with the Collect for the Day, followed by the Gospel reading set for this Sunday, then my reflection and some prayer time at the end. So, let us pray:

Collect

God of truth,
help us to keep your law of love
and to walk in ways of wisdom,
that we may find true life
in Jesus Christ your Son. **Amen**

Today's Gospel reading is from Luke 8. 26-39

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As Jesus 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

Reflection

Today's readings are designed to give hope to the hopeless. In the Gospel passage we are introduced to a complete "no hoper", a man whose mind is so deranged that he lives naked in a graveyard.

People would just have no idea how to cope with such a man. They would be frightened of him, just as today we are frightened of people who are mentally ill.

It's not always without good reason. Someone who is very disturbed can be a danger not just to themselves but to others too. So this poor man is totally isolated. Like so many people with mental illness, imprisoned within his own mind.

In those days, such behaviour would always have been regarded as madness or demonic possession.

Jesus is not concerned with reasons for distress, but only by the distress itself. By a word he is able to restore this poor man. So the demoniac is given his life back, and Jesus, unlike everyone else, actually confronts him face to face, bringing healing and peace.

Mental illness is one of the big problems of society. Obviously we don't think in terms of demon possession these days, though for some people it almost seems as though they have been taken by the grip of something which is very dark within them.

Most people who suffer from mental illness, however, are more likely to harm themselves than others, and there is the need for us all to be much more aware of the problems that they face. So mental illness is a real challenge to our society.

In the story from the Gospel, Jesus refuses to let go of the man's humanity. He recognises that there is something deep within the man that is ruling his mind, and he seeks to identify it by asking its name, and then he is healed. He has his fresh start.

In the next weeks, all of the readings provided on Sundays will help us explore what it means to be a Christian Disciple. There will be a common strand running through all of them and it springs from the depiction of Jesus in the Gospels. Simply put, it is the law of love.

If there was one little phrase that would carry us through all of those explorations it is this *'perfect love casts out fear'* - just a few words, but the implications are so significant.

Our vision of Jesus is one in which he commands the demon to leave the broken man; he commands the storm to be stilled, he speaks with an authority that leaves the religious leaders envious and brooding. He questioned people's attitudes then just as he does now, - not out of anger, not out of pity, but in love; and that love casts out fear.

He was reminding the people of a loving God who has a purpose for our lives, so Jesus becomes an embodiment of the greatest theme that runs through the whole of scripture. 'Do not be Afraid.'

Jesus gives the demoniac his sanity, he healed those who came to him, he taught people how to live their lives. Healing, in its fullest sense, comes when we are confident, at ease with ourselves and when we are sure of our destiny- which is to abide in the arms of the Father. Love is the key to all relationships including our own level of self esteem.

There is a song which has the title *'Love is something if you give it away'*. It's often sung in schools. If we are called to be people who love, then there is an assumption that we love, in

relationship with others. It's not enough to know that we are loved by God, we can only truly experience that when we seek to offer love to others.

It's easy to love the people who are close to you, but Jesus asks us to do something that is both simple and yet very radical. We are called to love the one that we are with, at this moment in time.

It's not so easy to love the person that you are with if they are giving you a hard time. It's not so easy if they just don't seem to make sense to you. It's not so easy when that person is seeking to bring you down in some way. Sometimes reconciliation can only be approached after the fighting has ended, and it can take a long time.

Loving the person that you are with is much harder than one might think, and yet.... This is what Jesus is calling us to do; it's part of his radical manifesto for change in the human condition. Yet it is something to aspire to as we seek to be disciples of Jesus in the real sense of the word.

This time when the Church marks the Sundays after Trinity is not just a gentle meander through the scriptures— but a real challenge to us to take the demands of our faith seriously. It's no easy task, which is why we recently marked the coming of the Holy Spirit to be our guide. Let's pray that the Spirit will lead us into the deep demands of faith; and enable us to be instruments of God's healing love.

Amen.

Intercessions

Lord, you have warned us that a house divided against itself will not long be able to stand. Help the Church which is one in the greatness of your love, but divided by the littleness of our own. May we become less preoccupied with those things that divide us, the better to concentrate on those we hold in common.

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer

Lord of truth and judgment, when we are overwhelmed by the growing gulf between rich and poor, inspire us with hope that the true strength of the gentle and merciful One will overcome the brittle force of the unfaithful and powerful who dominate in this world.

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer

Lord, we ask you to bless our families, friends and neighbours. Help us in our relationships with them, and fill us, we pray, with love and forgiveness to any who have offended us. May we receive them in love, acknowledging that we too have need of healing and pardon in our turn. Help us Lord to reflect upon the sins which we commit. Help us to be repentant of all that turns us aside from you.

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer

We pray for all those whom we love who suffer in body, mind or spirit. May their pain be lessened, or may they find the strength to endure. Comfort them with your presence, we pray,

and help them to hold fast to that which is good, and not to lose heart.

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer

Lord, extend our vision, we pray, so that we may look beyond the immediate to the eternal. We remember before you all those who now see you in that glory which is beyond measure as they join you with the multitudes beyond number...

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer

Eternal God,
comfort of the afflicted and healer of the broken,
you daily renew us with life and hope:
teach us the ways of gentleness and peace,
that all the world may acknowledge
the kingdom of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.