

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. When 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.

Luke 8:26-39, 2016

“Come to me, hear my words, and act on them.”

You may remember that a couple of weeks ago I picked up this theme that comes directly from Jesus’ words to carry us through the month of June at least.

They say something about discipleship especially when connected to the many stories we read about Jesus’ ministry.

Jesus said I will show you what one is like who comes, hears and acts,

and He then goes around Galilee and other places to show His followers what He was teaching them in His Sermon On the Plain.

In our story today He goes to one of those other places;

a place where by all Jewish understanding He had no business.

But He went.

This is a story about Jesus stepping out in a place where He has no business, and doing something that not everyone is going to like for the sake of casting evil out of,

not just a man, but the world.

There was a price to be paid for the restoration of this man to society,

and it would appear the owner of the pigs paid the price.

I wonder if he thought it was worth it.

We have all the elements of a great tragedy in this story,

evil inhabiting humanity

suffering in a community trying to deal with this evil that is beyond their control,

a savior going to a place He has not yet gone before this day,

love and care shown to a man who is in need of healing.

This weekend, this lesson cannot be taken out of the context we are living in right now.

That context is one of human tragedy, evil violence the likes of which most of us have never experienced,

- and in the aftermath heroic acts of selflessness,
- a community not that far away from us in need of healing,
- and the loving care given and received in that community.

This has hit quite close to home for all of us if in no other way than by geography.

But this mass shooting at the Pulse night club was not the beginning of tragedy over the weekend,

nor the end of it.

On Friday evening a man who had driven from the St. Petersburg area to Orlando,

entered a meet and greet where Christina Grimme was welcoming fans and signing autographs,

and shot her.

If any of you are fans of the Voice you know who Christina is— she finished in third place on season six of the show.

Then, on Tuesday there was the two year old dragged into a lagoon by an alligator at Disney World, the home of glitz and glitter,

a fantasy world where everything is supposed to be perfect,
a place where everyone believes the harsh reality of
this world doesn't exist,
and yet it does.

There are many people in need of healing this week, some because they have lost loved ones,

others because they were first responders, provided medical care for victims,

accompanied families through the horror of walking through the valley of the shadow of death,

investigated the crime scenes,

searched for and handled the bodies,

and some of us because we are all a part of the same humanity regardless of the things that make us different or would otherwise separate us.

These tragedies hurt us all.

I spent a lot of time traveling and visiting family while all this was going on,

and so there was not much time to dwell on the continuous reports about the Pulse nightclub shooting until we got home in the wee hours of Wednesday morning.

Even since then I found it all hard to take in.

I have no direct connection with any of those who were killed or their families or friends,

and so I experience a distance between that event and myself.

You may experience that or something else, and this is one of the things that distresses me about this;

I don't know exactly where each of you are with all this.

All I can do is lead you to God's Word and the love He has given you, and pray that is enough.

Yet I struggle with many things related to these tragedies.

I struggle with the fact that an LGBT community was the target of that attack,

and at the same time the attacker had ties to an even greater evil force within the radicalized Islamic community that does not represent all Muslims.

I struggle to make sense of the attacker's emotional state and what may have driven him to this horrific act.

I struggled with the politicizing of the shooting this week, and that observation is not reserved for one person or party.

I struggle with this in the political environment that exists in our country today,

and the wedges that are driven between us because of an inability to allow another to have their own opinion.

I struggle with another layer of violence committed against an unsuspecting young woman who with open arms greeted her own attacker immediately before he shot her.

I struggle with the question of guns in our society.

I struggle with the horrific loss of a little boy and what his parents are now dealing with,

not because of evil act of violence, but an act of nature.

The pain is no less.

I struggle with this shroud of grief that seems to hang over me this week.

I struggle with the “What now?” and “What next?”

This is a complicated world we live in, and I don’t know how to make sense of it all, and I struggle with what to do, what to say.

As a pastor I feel like I should know what to say, and that I should have some answers,

but I just don’t have the words.

Our Bishop of the Florida Bahamas Synod, Rev. Bob Schaefer has called for a day of mourning and lament in our worship this weekend.

This is certainly appropriate.

He suggests that we reflect upon the grief and sorrow we all feel and how that implicates us all in the common bonds of humanity,

To allow no place for the evil rhetoric of hate, but trust that “love casts out all fear.”

He calls us to mourn the loss of life, pray for the recovery of those injured and traumatized,

to lament our words and deeds that disparage and threaten the LGBT community, our Muslim neighbors and immigrants among us.

And to let our lament become the prophetic passion of healing love so that all people may feel welcome and safety in our midst.

For me, and I pray for all of us, this is a part of our coming to Jesus and hearing His words over a period of time,

because this wont happen all at once.

I don't know what to say but at times like this Jesus' words, the word of God speaks to us.

Taking in all that has happened is too much for us and so I think it might be right and good that we take smaller bites.

So, for now I want you to hear Jesus' words and what they speak to your heart.

Perhaps what we need to take care of first is to come to Jesus and hear His words,

and in those words find healing for this little piece of humanity that it may spread to others.

So come to Jesus, bring Him your pain, your suffering, your grief, your sorrow;

your frustration, anger and your hopes for a new and better tomorrow.

Give Jesus your tears, your broken heart, and allow Him to mend it.

Jesus has shown us what one is like who comes to Him, hears and acts.

They recognize evil when they see it and cast it out; they refuse to give it a place to live.

They refuse to hate, to engage the rhetoric of hate, but instead trust that love casts out all the fear that feeds our evil inclinations and gives hate life.

Jesus had compassion and love for a man possessed and cast a legion of evil demons out of him.

We are called to no less compassion and love.

You have come to hear Jesus. You have come to hear His words that inform your life, heal your spirit and your soul.

Hear these words now from Psalm 130 and allow them to heal:

I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come?

My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth.

The LORD will not let your foot be moved nor will the one who watches over you fall asleep.

Behold, the keeper of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep; the LORD watches over you; the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will preserve you from all evil and will keep your life.

Hear these words from Romans Chapter 6:

When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the

dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. For, if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Let us remember all who have died and commend all to God's loving and gracious care.

Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend all who have died in Orlando last Friday and Saturday nights, on Tuesday evening,

our loved ones among us and around the world whose passing brings us sorrow.

Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, sheep of your own fold, lambs of your own flock, sinners of your own redeeming, receive them into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light.

Rest eternal grant them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.

May these words bring comfort, some degree of closure, some relief,

some consolation for the days ahead while we all continue to come,

hear and process the things we can't fully understand, while we stand with those who have lost so much.

Amen.

