

A Sermon by the Reverend Timothy A R Cole
The Second Sunday after Pentecost: Trinity Sunday (C)
Sunday, June 23, 2019

Isaiah 65:1-9 | Psalm 22: 18-27
Galatians 3:23-29 | Luke 8:26-39

When I was young, my father, who was a parish priest also, often used to use a phrase whenever he had to do something that was inconvenient or, indeed, when he needed me to do something that I didn't really want to do. "Noblesse oblige" – he used to say. Literally, "Nobility obliges", which is the idea that those who have rank or privilege also carry a responsibility to do things for other people and to be generous with what they have. If you have the position you also have the obligation. Which reminds me of a story.

One Sunday morning, a mother began to waken her son. "George, it's time to wake up", she said. George replied, "I don't want to get up. I'm tired!" "But Georgie, you have to get up; it's Sunday, and we don't want to be late for Church." He replied: "I don't want to go to Church!" "Oh George, it's Sunday, and you have to go to Church." "I don't want to go." "But why not?" she asked. "Because," he replied, "I hate it." "You hate it? But why?" "Because it's stupid: the sermons are boring, the music is terrible, the people are dumb, and the clergy all hate me." "Oh Georgie, it's not that bad. Now please, get up, or we will be late for Church." "I'm not going", he replied. "But Georgie, you must." "Give me one good reason why I should go." His mother replied, "Well, George, first of all, you are the bishop!"

Today we are Commissioning a group of 20 Christ Church youth and adults to go on a Mission trip to Tennessee in Appalachia. I am fortunate enough to be going with them. We will be working, with other groups, for the Appalachia Service Project and we'll be going to help make people's homes wind and watertight. We had a look at some of the applications for help that the organization receives and it was salutory. Many were reporting incomes of between \$750 and \$1300 per month. It is important that our young people, and we ourselves, remember just how fortunate we are compared to so many people in this country, and the world. By these mission trips, we are trying to learn that lesson. We are not kidding

ourselves that our week's work is going to have a huge impact on the poverty of the world, but we are going in faith, in the hope that we can help and encourage a few people and also that God will work in our hearts to build in us that sense of Noblesse Oblige, of obligation, to include, in our whole fortunate lives, an aspect of service to others. We watched a video about the project and it was clear that, as much as the work done, it was the presence and kindness of volunteers that is most appreciated by those being served.

Today's wonderful readings are all about unity.

In the Gospel we have the story of the poor demoniac. His mind is so broken and divided and tormented that he cannot be contained, even with chains. Jesus come across him naked on the road with his broken fetters still around his ankles.

His name, he says, is Legion, for he is driven by so many demons.

Now, today, we would recognize Legion as a suffering from a severe mental illness, Schizophrenia, Split personality, personality disorder or something like that. Since coming to Georgetown, I have met a number of homeless people who are not a million miles away from Legion. One man who came to see me was arguing with a voice in his head and you could see that he was sometimes one person and sometimes another. He was divided in his mind at least once and maybe more.

People like that and the demoniac are frightening, not just because of what they might do, what violence may come out of them, but also, on a deeper level, because we recognize in them something, we know in ourselves. We all have our demons. We all have different parts of ourselves that press for ascendancy in us. There is the petulant child that wants revenge, and the selfish dragon that wants to gather their horde in the darkness and keep everyone away. These parts of ourselves vie with the child that wants to love and be loved, and the grown up that desires the light of truth, and seeks to take responsibility for ourselves and what we do.

Jesus, confronts the Demoniac's demons. Just by his presence they are made to fall back. In the face of the wholeness of God the divisions in the mind of the

demoniac know they cannot stand. Jesus does not send them into the swine. They ask permission to go and he gives it. The dramatic suicide of the pigs is the visible sign of their departure. The Demonic is made whole. His mind is restored. Made once more a unity in himself.

Perhaps the most moving part of the story for me is when the healed demoniac begs Jesus to let him come with him. Here is the one in whom all healing and wholeness resides. The healed man wants to leave everything and follow only him. Jesus says no. He sends him back to his family because unity in Christ is not just about being one with Christ. It is also about being one with our families, our friends and all those God sends to us in our lives.

St Paul says in this morning's Epistle;

"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

Ours is a very divided world. A world divided by wealth and poverty, by culture and language, by ideology and faith. It's a world made up of people like us who do not lack our demons and divisions in our hearts and souls. Christ meets us all on the road and sees our nakedness and the broken chains of the divisions that bind us and offers us a different way.

St Paul is of course not saying that Jews and Greeks, Men and Women, slaves and free cease to be what they are. That would be to deny reality. It would mean that there would be no reason to send the Demoniac back to his family, his community, his people. For why do that, if these things did not still matter a lot? What it does mean is that there is the offer of a relationship, a wholeness, and a unity that goes deeper than all our differences. It is the offer of relationship with God in Christ. If we are united in Him, then difference ceases to be division and becomes opportunity. St Paul uses the analogy of the Body to describe this. The hand can help the foot and the foot can help the hand. The hand can do what the foot cannot do and the foot can do what the hand cannot do. Every Christian has what they have to give. All of us are ennobled by Christ as Children of God and have therefore : "Noblesse oblige", the obligation to do what we can to be Christs hands and feet in the world. So, when our little group of very affluent parishioners

go to Appalachia, we are going to give what we can, but we go knowing also that we are just a set of hands and feet, and that everybody has those. We also know that we too have one sort of nakedness or another, one set of demons or another, and our own particular set of chains that we need freed from. We go to help but also to be helped. So, when we come back, we know that, like the Bishop in the joke, we have to get out of our beds and do Christ's work, not because we always want to, but because of who we are as chosen, adopted and commissioned Children of God and members of Christ's Body.