

Luke 8:26-39

Control Issues

Power. The power of nature. Water's ability to flood plains and whole areas. We see that played out over and over across Canada and other parts of the world as water encroaches the banks of rivers and shorelines. We want water to stay the course, to remain in the boundaries that are set, but when it downpours for days or threatens to creep over roads and into homes we are at a loss to control it.

The same with fire. Fire has power. Fire isn't concerned about the boundaries we may set for it. It goes out of control easily and without regard for the forests and communities that are in its path. It doesn't care if you have made a firebreak. It will happily catch on the wings of a wind and move how it pleases.

We talk about power in the halls of government and business. One only need look at the power Russia is exerting over the Ukraine, or the hearing regarding the insurrection in the US last year to know that power likes to dominate. Or pay attention to the way that refugees are being managed across the globe in order to know the dominance that one group can feel over another and crush the other with their boundaries of where they can go or not go.

We have boundaries around our countries and around our cities. On this National Indigenous Sunday, we acknowledge and grieve the boundaries created for the Indigenous people of Turtle Island, or what we know as North America. These boundaries and lack of understanding of the gifts of Indigenous people have left decades of harm in their wake, and the harm continues to be perpetuated in attitudes and the unwillingness to let go of what has been experienced and known to have caused great pain and disruption in the lives of Indigenous people.

We also consider how our power and control has brought pain and harm to those in the LGBTQI2S+ community as we are coming to the end of Pride month that goes throughout the month of June.

Power, control, boundaries and let me add the word, chains. All of these name that in which we keep those we fear or don't understand, how it keeps all of this at a distance. We don't want to confront it or deal with it. We think out of sight out of mind.

The homeless on the streets don't really concern us until they are sitting intoxicated and messy on the steps of our churches or stand by our vehicle windows with their signs asking for "anything" that would help. We can't wait for the light to turn green so that we don't have to sit in our privilege and be confronted by the lack of opportunity and equity in our society.

Which leads me to the story of the man with the demon that Jesus goes to. Jesus literally crosses boundaries to be with the man, to heal him. To set him free from the burden he is living with. This man is so far gone that he is chained and shackled and yet so strong that he is feared by all in the community. He is out of control, naked, living in and among the tombs. As long as he stays there the people feel that they have some safety, some control over him. The chains make others feel safe.

Still, Jesus goes to him, heals him. Once Jesus has done his healing, we and those in the story, find the man clothed and in his right mind, sitting with Jesus. He is so thankful for the healing for the transformation of his life that he desires more than anything to travel with Jesus, to be with Jesus.

But those who have been witnesses to this transformation are fearful and terrified. Not knowing how to control the man, they are now faced with another power that is so strong that they fear its control. That power was Jesus' power to heal, to make whole that which seemed beyond hope. The witnesses and then the people of the surrounding country ask Jesus to leave. He is too much for them. They have just seen or heard about an entire herd of swine going over a cliff...because of Jesus.

Writer and pastor, David Lose, shares this,

What causes such deep fear?

I suspect it is the way in which Jesus' presence and power disrupts the social order. While they were unable either to cure or to contain the demon-possessed man, the villagers at least were accustomed to him. He knew his place and they knew theirs – or more accurately, they knew his place, out in the wilds. Perhaps understandably, they are alarmed when the former demoniac comes once again among them, even though he has been cured, because the social order to which they have become accustomed is utterly upset.

Odd as it may sound, we often prefer the devil we know to the freedom we do not.¹

And that is the crux. We don't set people free; we fight and struggle against change because we know what we know and something different scares that heck out of us.

As St. Andrew's has been working on trying to figure out our future story, many who participated in the small groups are both excited and fearful about the discussions they had. We are so used to being this historical church with deep roots, of doing worship and work in a certain way, of knowing who to expect in our worship, that knowing that we will have to radically change to continue in a post Christian world is daunting and scary to say the least.

¹ ¹ Lose, David J. *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 3 Pentecost and Season After Pentecost*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P169..

Even over the years, change in something, such as the tea and bazaar, has created panic and concern, angst and even some mild anger when the times and routines have been changed. It was especially evident when the date for the tea and bazaar was moved up one weekend in November to accommodate changes in patterns of shopping and behaviour as Christmas approached. If something such as this could cause angst, one can expect that more drastic changes will create tension and may cause some to become fearful and angry.

In another area of change, though this congregation has been wonderful at welcoming, and are working hard at becoming even more open to those we don't understand, who look and live differently from us, particularly the homeless that find a place to sit around our building, it is not without fear and some trepidation that we do this welcoming. It is much easier when our community members, as we call them out of respect, just move away from the building on Sunday morning, rather than us being confronted by the unknowns of their movements and behaviours.

Into all of this, in the church, in our personal lives, in our places of work and worship, onto our streets, and into our houses of government, comes the power of Jesus to transform, not just in little ways but in monumental ways, how we perceive and interact with others. Hope we live and care for all.

Jesus isn't too worried about our reactions. We may be like the man who was fully restored in body, mind, and spirit, and want to stay with Jesus. We may be more like the people who just wanted Jesus to get going and leave them to their familiar ways. And we may be anywhere on that continuum. But Jesus' presence changes things.

Even though the people wanted Jesus to go, and he did, they would never be able to forget that encounter. On top of that, the now healed man would forever be a witness to that encounter, that power.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are now that witness in our families and community. We can choose to be a healing, restoring presence that embraces the fear and the chaos, the changes that Jesus brings when we let the power of love and hope, justice and transformation be a part of our experience and way in the world, or we can choose to ignore that power, stay fearful and protected, allowing the chains of despair, power, dominance and superiority to hold people captive, not for their sakes and protection, but for our own.

Be encouraged to face the fear of lack of control and boundaries in ways that restore everyone to wholeness, in ways that allows the transforming power of Jesus to change us, our churches, our communities, our governments, and world. In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.