

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

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

June 19, 2022
The Second Sunday after Pentecost

Only the hungry search for bread.
Only the thirsty look for water.
This is a place for those who are hungry and thirsty in spirit.

Only those who ache for meaning will pursue it.
Only those who yearn for a deeper life will seek it.
This is a place for those who ache and yearn for something more.

So let us come here today with our hunger and thirst,
our unsatisfied longings, our heart-felt yearnings,
and let the God of life satisfy our souls.

~ written by Ann Siddall

This is the place...all of you who are hungry and thirsty in spirit. This is the place...all of you who ache and yearn for something more. This is the place that God will satisfy your soul. I want you to hear those words and take them to heart.

We all need a place. We need a place to rest, to be healed, to be loved. We ache and yearn for our brokenness to be made whole, our weakness to be overcome by strength, our demons to be banished by all of the goodness that is surrounding us. A place where the world is free of hate and violence. A world that is full of opportunity and not scarcity. A world where God truly satisfies our every need.

Do you believe this kind of place is possible?

For Legion in our Gospel this morning, the answer was easy. He believed it was possible. He had been tortured in mind, body, and spirit. Legion was the embodiment of deep human suffering. Naked, living in a graveyard, isolated, tormented, bound in chains.

"I am Legion." I imagine him yelling those words out with the force of desperation that you can only feel when you are in the darkest of places. I am pain. I am suffering. I can't go any further on my own. And so we yell out, Jesus, I need you to know this. I need you to know how much I hurt. This is who I am. I am Legion.

It is the rawest form of pain. And Legion looks to one source for healing. He looks to Jesus. Just imagine the depth of his trust and hope in that moment when he calls out. Here is his Savior in front of him. Here is the possibility for an unimaginable new life and so he calls out in pure faith. Legion knew God was present in that moment. And his demons were lifted. He was healed.

And then we find him at Jesus' feet ready to become a disciple of Jesus. And Jesus sends him out to proclaim that this place is good and possible and waiting with arms open wide for all to come in.

This is the story of Legion. Now, I want you to consider another story. In a stark parallel to Legion's loud and bold faith, Mother Teresa once wrote in her diaries that God did not feel present to her at all. Her raw words of doubt are startling to the imagination for the faithful servant we have all come to know.

In her diaries Mother Teresa named her demons. Demons of emptiness, loneliness, pain, and spiritual darkness. She wrote, *"There is so much contradiction in my soul, no faith, no love, no zeal... I find no words to express the depths of the darkness... My heart is so empty... so full of darkness... I don't pray any longer. The work holds no joy, no attraction, no zeal... I have no faith, I don't believe."*

I don't believe. And yet, even though she wasn't calling out to God like Legion, even though she found herself at times in deep disbelief, she kept coming back to the work of building this place. This place of hope and abundance. This place for those who are hungry and thirsty in spirit. When she didn't know if she believed this place was possible or if God cared, she worked anyway.

Even though their journeys of faith were quite different both Legion and Mother Teresa had one thing in common. They both found themselves at the feet of Jesus, ready to be his disciples.

As I think about both of their stories, I am struck at the utter humility of these two people. The humility to say I am broken and yet both found the conviction and the strength to work not just for themselves but for others who also sought a healing place.

It's not easy to risk that kind of vulnerability. For some of us, it will be much easier to simply not try. To let our fears and doubts overcome our hope for transformation. To allow our darkness to maintain a tight grip on our lives. As one commentator wrote: *"Sometimes the terror we know is more tolerable than the peace we cannot imagine."*

In many ways that is the story of the townspeople in our Gospel. As they witness the miraculous healing of Legion they are so deeply gripped by terror that they can't do anything except turn away from the possibility of a new place of healing and abundance.

They become immobile, unable to look at the redeemed man, pushing Jesus away, returning to the way things were, unwilling to accept the change that was right in front of them. They can't imagine the peace that is available to them and so they tolerate the terror.

The terror wasn't something Mother Teresa would or could tolerate. Even though she felt like a shameless hypocrite for struggling so much with God, she came to understand the struggle this way...

"If I'm going to be a saint, I'm going to be a saint of darkness, and I'll be asking from heaven to be the light of those who are in darkness on Earth."

Dan Clendenin, one of my favorite commentators states that, "Mother Teresa eventually concluded that her spiritual darkness was not an obstacle to her call from God to serve the poor, but instead central to that call. In her own darkness she identified with the poor, and shared in the sufferings of Christ himself, who on the cross screamed in agony at the abandonment of God."

In the timeless book *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck writes, "Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it."

We transcend it. That is the story of Legion. That is the story of Mother Teresa. That is our story. We can find a way to claim this place...all of us who are hungry and thirsty in spirit. We can claim this place...all of us who ache and yearn for something more. Because this is the place that God will satisfy your soul. In much faith or in little faith. In exuberant acclamation or quiet resolve. Whether you scream out for God or cautiously whisper to him. God is there saying, this place is possible.

So let us come here today with our hunger and thirst,
our unsatisfied longings, our heart-felt yearnings,
and let the God of life satisfy our souls.

Thanks be to God. Amen.