

May what is spoken here and what is heard be spoken and heard in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In today's Gospel reading, we heard that: "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 in his right minds. And they were afraid".

They were afraid. At one level, I'm really surprised by that. Why were they afraid? A person who had been very, very sick - in body and in mind, apparently - was now healed - and, even had some clothes on. I would think that would be good news, cause for rejoicing, not a reason to be afraid.

But at another level, I wonder if something other than the healing itself was what was inviting those folks into a fearful place. Jesus brought healing to someone who had been very sick for a very long time. And if Jesus could change his life, then there might be other changes on the horizon as well.

As we all know, not all changes are good. And as every parish in transition knows, change - good change or not-so-good change can be a scary thing indeed.

I've often teased that one of the central sayings of us Episcopalians is this: 'but we've always done it that way'. And with that kind of mind set, even a positive change can indeed seem frightening.

I suspect it is in that spirit - clinging to what we're used to - that we put up with all the rules and regulations in our lives. To be sure, from time to time we all rebel against and even break rules and regulations. I bet I'm not the only person here who, from time to time, has exceeded a posted speed limit, or who ever stayed out later than curfew. But even so, those rules and regs do bring us some measure of comfort, because at least we know not only what we can expect, but also what is expected of us.

In this morning's reading, from the Letter to the Galatians, we hear that now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to the law as our disciplinarian. But even that can feel a little scary, because at least we know what to expect under the law.

So along comes Jesus, to the man we heard about in today's Gospel - and to you and to me, by the way - and we too want to ask: "what have you to do with me, Jesus, ... I beg you do not torment me" ... especially if it means that things are going to change. We don't want our world to be turned upside down, even if the world isn't perfect, because at least we know what we're confronting.

[Pause]

But that kind of fear, and that kind of resistance is not what we are called to - you and I - as Christians. When the demoniac had been healed, and even though he begged Jesus that he might stay with him, Jesus sent him away, saying: "return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And, we are told, the healed man did just that.

Jesus wasn't just talking to that man. We too are told to go into whatever venue is ours, and declare how much God has done for us. That's not to suggest that we get on a train or a plane, for example, and tell whoever is sitting next to us all about Jesus, whether or not they want to hear.

Instead, I believe, it means that we live lives of honesty and integrity, and that we help our neighbors in need, whether they live in the Dominican Republic or frequent the local soup kitchen, and that we teach our children about the God who loved so much that he sent his only Son to live and die and rise for us.

To be sure, not all change is good; we all know that. But all we need to do is look out our windows to realize that some changes do need to happen before the world out there will look fully redeemed. What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Well, for one thing, we too have encountered healing at his hands, and not only by our baptism and partaking of his body and blood, but also in many ways, day in and day out.

And we too are told to return to our homes and declare how much God has done for us. As the sign at the back of this church so rightly proclaims as we walk out the door, "worship is over; now the service begins".

Let it be so for us, in Christ's name. Amen.

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