

- The second reading is from the Galatians, chapter three. Now before faith came, we were imprisoned, and guarded under the law, until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian, until Christ came. So that we might be justified by faith, but now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to an disciplinarian for in Christ Jesus, we are children of God through faith. As many of you were baptized into Christ, have closed yourself with Christ, 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 offering, heirs according to the promise, this is the word of the Lord. The third reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Luke, chapter eight. Then they arrived to the country of Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city, who had demons who met him, for a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in a tomb, 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 demons 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 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, so then 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 swine herd 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, this is the word of the Lord. [Congregation] Praise the Light.

- I'd like to take a moment of personal privilege, to give thanks to God for the ministry of this place, for the staff and the congregation and all those here, and especially on this day to give thanks to God for the ministry and witness of Deborah Brazil. I preached in this chapel on Deborah's first Sunday, and I recalled it last night, and I think it's a fitting close for both of us to be here, sharing in the leadership of worship this morning. But I do thank you, Deborah, for what you have meant to me. Let us pray. Oh, God, silence in us any voice but your own, that hearing your word, we may believe and obey, amen. Our culture is often loathe to name things what they are, we disguise the truth with clever words, firings become downsizing, lying or cheating is a character flaw, unfaithfulness becomes an affair of passion, gluttony, drunkenness and greed get labeled addictions, evil moreover, is represented by a vapid theology that suggests nothing worse than mere unpleasantness or absence of good, the scripture lesson for today, forces us to take seriously the demonic dimension of life and Jesus' power over it. But first, we need to ask just where is the demonic

located, this story from the Gospel of Luke, sheds some light on the answers to that question with straight forwardness and an ironic twist, lets consider first the situation of the man from the city, Gerasenes, he is unwelcome, the one rejected by his community. Granted, he wore no clothes nor lived in a house, pretty strange by any conventional standards, his neighbors did not want him running loose in their neighborhood, so they kept him under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he broke the bounds, and ran into the wilds and lived among the tombs, you know it seems every community has some unwelcome element we would like to keep out of the spheres of our lives, not in my neighborhood, how many times have we heard that, better yet, how many times have we said that? The public schools decide to place children impaired with a variety of emotional, cognitive, and physical conditions in all classrooms. We worry about how the teachers and other children will be affected, why can't special education classes have their own rooms, corridors, even entrances? The county buys a house for the rehabilitation of substance abusers, uh-oh, recovering addicts are unpredictable and uncontrollable. What if they back slide, they will share our sidewalks, and lurk outside as we walk to our cars. There are numerous ways to deal with those who are unwelcome, to banish them, control them, keep them out of the way, Pat Conroy, in his novel, Prince of Tides, describes starkly what it must be like from the other side. In mental hospitals, no matter how humanistic or enlightened, keys are the manifest credentials of power. The steel asterisks of freedom and mobility. The march of orderlies and nurses is accompanied by the alienating cacophony of singing keys, striking against thighs, annotating the passage of the free, when you find yourself listening to their keys and owning none, you will come close to understanding the white terror of the soul, that comes from being banished from all commerce with human kind. We have a glimpse of where the demonic is located from one angle. But I do not mean to imply that there isn't more. And here it is, the unwelcome power. The unwelcome power is any source of evil, whether in an individual or human systems and structures. One biblical commentator writes of this story about the demoniac, even if one were to accept demon possession, as a way to name the disintegration of someone's personality, that we recognize as mental illness, and even if we were to recognize exorcism as a way to speak about healing, Luke's story is marked by such grotesque and fantastic descriptions, that it is like a caricature, drawn in primary colors. The fact is that we are not simply faced with an interesting medical case, but with the presence of the demonic, evil is real not theoretical, and none of us has to look further than ourselves, to know the demons that we struggle with. Self absorption, control, addictions of every kind, dishonesty, mistrust, jealousy, we can fill in the blanks for ourselves. Then there are the movements in which groups get caught, that work for evil. Whether it is in the senseless bombing of a nightclub by a militia group, people yelling obscenities and throwing rocks at other people because they have a different skin color or practice a different religion, or an undeclared and illogical war, we see the enslaving power of the demonic, an unwelcome power, if we are going to take seriously the force of evil, then even more we need to take seriously what God does about it. God sends Jesus to prevail over the demons, and defeat them he does, central to the ministry of Jesus and the Gospel of Luke, is Jesus' power to cast out demons, Jesus announces that a new age is breaking in, the Kingdom of God is here, therefore, he commands the demons to depart. That is why the demons cry out when they meet Jesus. They know that for them his coming means the beginning of the end, two chapters later in Luke, the 70 commissioned followers of Jesus joyfully report, "Lord, in your name, even the demons submit to us." to which Jesus replies, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning, see I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you." Luke delights in Jesus' display of power over demons. And what a demonstration of power of

Jesus unfolds in this story about the Gerasenes. Immediately, upon stepping out on land, Jesus is recognized by the demons, I said demons, not just one, but Legion, there were many, the possessed man falls upon the ground, and foolishly, the demons negotiate with Jesus so as not to be sent into the abyss, Jesus agrees to their request to enter the swine, but they wind up in the abyss anyway and are drowned. The spectacle Luke records had many witnesses, and the man sitting clothed and in his right mind, gave truth to the testimony of those who told the story. Now if Luke's story ended here, we could all joyfully celebrate the arrival of a power greater than evil, claim that all is right in the world, and go home, but it doesn't and we can't, not yet, anyway. The ironic twist Luke presents is this, Jesus is the unwelcome power of good. The very folk who tried to control and contain the Gerasenes, recognized the mystery and power of what has taken place, but they cannot make a place for it, or accommodate it in their lives, and they asked Jesus to leave, Jesus' power of good is unwelcome, he is rejected. And in that, to be sure, the demonic is located as well, it is only the one from whom the demons were exorcized, who appreciates Jesus and his power, the neighbors, Luke records, were seized with great fear, fear of what? Power over the demons, I suspect it's something more. A psychiatrist friend has written that when a destructive force of behavior is driven away, it has to be substituted with a good force. A community that wants to rid itself of war making, needs to substitute it with assertive peace making. A bad habit has to be replaced with a good habit. Perhaps this community of the Gerasenes was so accustomed to the evil presence, that it could push away or work around that freedom and wholeness were scary to them. They couldn't change and accept and unknown power. Even Jesus' power of good over the known and predictable power of evil, and that is often the response to workers of justice and righteousness. Julia Esquivel, is Guatemalan, a human rights activist, theologian, and poet. Her poem, I am Not Possessed, is dedicated to the many valiant women of her Quatemala, it goes, "I am not possessed, I am not crazy, obsessed with an idea, I am simply a woman with a human heart, I am a rebel when faced with a cold and calculated correctness of a bureaucrat, he who is always bound by the limits of the correct, the objective, and the prudent of an always neutral balance. The one who avoids taking risks for the sake of his office and his prestige, I am the possessor of not possessed by the normality of a woman that rejects and always will reject the disorder constituted by macho's, all of them potential generals, by all who place the law above life, the institution above humanity, the personal project above truth, fear above love, ambition above humility, that I must admit to those obsessed with such criteria, I am a red hot coal, lighted by the fire of a great love, brother, do you know the story of the burning bush that was never consumed?" Juliet Esquivel has been exiled from Guatemala since 1980, the unwelcome power of good. So if the man who's demons were exercised, is the only one who appreciates Jesus and his power of good, what does that mean for us? I believe Jesus' power of good will continue to be unwelcome to us, until our own demons are exorcized, and Jesus' power of good is welcomed as a way of life, exorcisms are largely ignored in our culture, as Kathleen Norris notes in her new book, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*, "I suspect that most people have experiences that need to be exorcized," she writes. Fortunately, exorcisms have not been quite killed off in the modern Protestant Church, I enjoy finding them tucked away in hymns, where people tend not to notice them, what might be considered Martin Luther's theme song, the tough and resolute a mighty fortress is our God, puts it well, in the third stirring verse, and those this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us, the Prince of Darkness Grim, we tremble not for him, his rage we can endure, for low his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him. We need to believe what we sing, that little word is Jesus. Jesus is the one who dispels all demons and leads us to a new way of life, a life in which each and every one

who calls upon his name, welcomes the unwelcome, engages evil as the enemy, defeats the demonic, and works towards good, even when it is unwelcome. My friends, Jesus' power is good news, and it is the only hope we have to transform the world into what is not yet, and to purge it from what seems to be, amen.