

**Isaiah 65:1-9**

I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask,  
to be found by those who did not seek me.  
I said, "Here I am, here I am,"  
to a nation that did not call on my name.  
2 I held out my hands all day long  
to a rebellious people,  
who walk in a way that is not good,  
following their own devices;  
3 a people who provoke me  
to my face continually,  
sacrificing in gardens  
and offering incense on bricks;  
4 who sit inside tombs,  
and spend the night in secret places;  
who eat swine's flesh,  
with broth of abominable things in their vessels;  
5 who say, "Keep to yourself,  
do not come near me, for I am too holy for you."  
These are a smoke in my nostrils,  
a fire that burns all day long.  
6 See, it is written before me:  
I will not keep silent, but I will repay;  
I will indeed repay into their laps  
7 their[a] iniquities and their[b] ancestors' iniquities together,  
says the Lord;  
because they offered incense on the mountains  
and reviled me on the hills,  
I will measure into their laps  
full payment for their actions.  
8 Thus says the Lord:  
As the wine is found in the cluster,  
and they say, "Do not destroy it,  
for there is a blessing in it,"  
so I will do for my servants' sake,  
and not destroy them all.  
9 I will bring forth descendants[c] from Jacob,  
and from Judah inheritors[d] of my mountains;  
my chosen shall inherit it,  
and my servants shall settle there.

**Psalms 22:19-28**

19 But you, O Lord, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!  
20 Deliver my soul from the sword,  
my life[c] from the power of the dog!  
21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued[d] me.

22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;[e]  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:  
23 You who fear the Lord, praise him!  
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!  
24 For he did not despise or abhor  
the affliction of the afflicted;  
he did not hide his face from me,[f]  
but heard when I[g] cried to him.  
25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.  
26 The poor[h] shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.  
May your hearts live forever!  
27 All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the Lord;  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.[i]  
28 For dominion belongs to the Lord,  
and he rules over the nations.

### **Galatians 3:23-29**

23 Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 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. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring,[k] heirs according to the promise.

### **Luke 8:22-39**

22 One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they put out, 23 and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. 24 They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. 25 He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" 26 Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn[e] no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. 28 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"— 29 for Jesus[f] 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 demon into the wilds.) 30 Jesus then asked him,

"What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. 31 They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

32 Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons[g] begged Jesus[h] to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33 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.

34 When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 35 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. 36 Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. 37 Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes[i] asked Jesus[j] to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus[k] sent him away, saying, 39 "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.

## **Sermon**

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

It's good to be with you this morning. I'm thankful to Pastor Paul for sharing this pulpit, and to the invitation of the council of Our Savior's Lutheran Church to be with you today. I also bring you greetings from the people of God at Christ Lutheran Church in Radford, a congregation whom I've served for nearly two years. As most of us know, our communities have begun some initial discussions about a possible future in ministry together. Rather than leave that unnamed or unspoken, I think it's healthier to get spoken, to let that air out of the balloon, to point to that elephant. We all know that God's got both of our congregations at strategic crossroads, and whatever happens with CLC and Our Savior's, I'm thankful for the opportunity to be with you

today in worship and to explore, today, just what it is God is up to, just where it is that God is leading us.

It's also important to note that we gather tragic and momentous time. Last weekend, 50 LGBTQ+ were targeted because they were LGBTQ+ Americans in a gay bar. Just over a year ago, a Lutheran young man, raised in one of our sister churches, walked into Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church and murdered 9 people, two of whom were graduates of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, my seminary, because they were black Christians. On Wednesday night this week, CLC hosted a vigil to name the victims of each of these attacks, to pray for their families and their cities, and to publically declare God's love for all people, for people who are gay and lesbian and bi and queer and trans and black and Latino and Muslim and whoever you might be, for God's love extends to all people, period.

This love that reaches beyond our humanly drawn boundaries is something we encounter in today's Gospel text. "Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee." This is a far piece to travel, and in every way, it is opposite Galilee. Of course, the plain meaning of the text is the geographical commentary, that the region of Gerasa was across the Sea of Galilee from the region of Nazareth. It was opposite Galilee on the map. The differences, however, did not end with location.

They're in foreign country, a Gentile region, ruled by different regional politicians than Galilee or Jerusalem. In the words of David Lose, president of the Lutheran seminary in Philadelphia, "no self-respecting Jewish rabbi would be taking his band of followers there." I wonder how many self-respecting heterosexual Lutherans would go to a gay bar, or how many white Lutherans would choose to spend time in a racial community where they're constantly the minority.

I'll tell you this. I've never been to a gay bar, and it's not because I've never been to a bar. And while I've lived in neighborhoods where white people were minorities, most of my life has been spent actively choosing to stay in the Galilees of my life rather than go to the Gerasas where I would feel isolated, at risk, alone. When Jesus leads the disciples to a place opposite Galilee, he doesn't just lead them to a different place on the map. He leads them to a place of uncertainty, where they have no power, where they're vulnerable and at risk.

And to get there, he leads them through the heart of a storm. Jesus calls the disciples into the boat and decides to grab some quick shuteye while the his friends frantically try to control the keel in the midst of a tempest. The storm rages until the disciples, fearing death, finally rouse Christ from his slumber. The Word of God stills the storm with a word from his mouth, and then turns his words to the disciples: *Where is*

*your faith?* Our faith, Lord? Where is our faith? You're literally asleep on the job, leading us to a place where we just don't want to go, and you're wondering where our faith is? The nerve of this guy!

So they get to the other side, Jesus confronts the demons that control this man, casts them out, and then what happens? He immediately turns around. After this single miracle, Jesus calls them back in the boat and leads his disciples back to the Galilee. Jesus went to the opposite of everything he knew in order to liberate this one man. But he didn't do it alone. Jesus led all the disciples, the apostles, the early cadre of the church into Gerasa along with him. Jesus led these Jews into the heart of Gentile country, an awkward transition from a land of comfort into a region of distress. Jesus risked his dignity as a Jew, his credibility as a rabbi, even the safety and security of his friends as travelers



without citizenship, just to liberate this single person from his physical chains and spiritual bondage.

When living in Durham, Michelle and I moved into a neighborhood that was about 1/3 white, 1/3 Latino, and 1/3 Black. Four townhomes down from us lived Trisha, an African American woman who, along with her husband Tony, who cared for a number of grandchildren. They all quickly became dear to us, and Jakayla, the middle granddaughter whose father was not a stable presence in her life, was particularly fond of us. It was a strange, foreign place to Michelle and I, opposite of most any place we'd ever lived, but over time, it became home to us. One evening, Trisha had come over to ask for prayer. She knew I was a pastor and, though they attended a different church, she trusted us to remember her and the family before God. Jakayla, who'd come with her, hugged me as she left. "Bye Drew!" she called. Trisha told her, "You know you can call

him Uncle Drew, right?" She looked at me with all the skepticism a six year old can muster, and I said, "Of course, dear. You can call me whatever you want." She hugged me again, tighter than ever before, then giggled as she ran away and called, "You've got a black niece!"

When Jesus calls us into places where we're uncomfortable, where we've got less power, where we're unknown, that's not a bad thing, but it will change us, change our families, change who we love. Jesus calls the disciples with him into Gerasa not only to witness the exorcism of the demons and the breaking of the chains, but to reveal to the disciples a profound truth: your liberation is his liberation. Your differences, real as they are, no longer divide you. Though you have many different identities, you now have one shared identity that subsumes all others: Children of God. Jesus takes the disciples through the storm and into this absolutely foreign place to create a new kind

of community, to give birth to a church that's not defined by bloodlines or ethnicities or cultures, but instead by the liberation brought to each of us by Jesus. Jesus led us into that neighborhood, and through that experience, not only liberated us, but brought us a new family no longer defined by race.

Perhaps this is obvious, but it's important to notice that Jesus doesn't make this man Jewish, or even un-Gentile. Instead, Jesus frees him of the things that bind him, both the physical changes and the psycho-spiritual bonds that possess his mind. Jesus frees him for abundant life as a Gentile, and even though he wants to come along back to Galilee, Jesus instead commissions him as an evangelist to the Garasenes. Go and tell your people all the good has done for you. The former demoniac stays in Gerasa, becoming an apostle with a commission equal to that of James and John, of Andrew and Peter. Even more than

that, his passion exceeds any of the other disciples, for notice that at the end of the story, while the rest of the disciples remain silent, only this newly liberated Gerasene is pleading to follow Jesus.

This seems pertinent to our Lutheran denomination as a whole, surely to our life together at CLC, and perhaps to this critical juncture in the life of Our Savior's as well. As a predominantly white church, with a predominantly European background, we've to realize that Jesus is calling us into the Gerasas of the world, not to make more Lutherans that joke about jello molds and lutefisk, not to make them like us, but to liberate people from the chains that bind their bodies and the demons that possess their minds. Jesus is calling us to grow the church by freeing people to be who God made them to be, even if that person makes us uncomfortable, even if that person is entirely different from us. Jesus is calling us to be

transformed both by the presence of God and the presence of the other people that God created to be different from us, because in those differences we more fully find the presence and purpose of God. Our denomination has for too long stayed in the Galilee's of northern European culture and been afraid to follow Jesus through the storm to the foreign lands and foreign peoples where Christ is bringing new life out of death, where Christ is freeing the possessed from their demons and the slaves from their chains. It's time for us to get in the boat and go, whether it's into black communities and gay communities, or immigrant communities and veteran communities, God is calling us to get in the boat, to weather the storm, and to see what Jesus is up to, changing the lives of other people, and through that, changing our lives as well. God is calling us to the places that are uncomfortable for us not just so we can liberate others, but so God can transform us as well.

We're called into these places because Jesus is in these places, because Jesus calls us to liberate people, because Jesus calls those people to liberate us. Not to make black people white, or make gay people straight, but to liberate one another from the chains that isolate us from community, from the demons that hide their God-given dignity.

This leaves us, it seems, with two questions. The first is this: Where is Christ leading us? Where, opposite of our comfort zones, outside of our power and privilege, is Jesus pushing us? Jesus calls us to follow, but where specifically do you think Jesus is calling Our Savior?

The second is the same question that Jesus put before the disciples: Where is our faith? Is it hunkered down in Galilee? Or with the Lord? Jesus doesn't call us to protect ourselves. Jesus calls us to follow in ways that will challenge us, that will change us, that will make us ever more like

Christ. Just remember: that liberation, for others and yourself,  
comes in the place that is opposite your Galilee.