

Sermon: Pentecost 2

The Rev. Mike Wernick

June 23, 2019

Year C

Isaiah 65:1-9

Psalm 22:19-28

Galatians 3:23-29

Luke 8:26-39

I used to have a mobile of the solar system... made with actual photographs of the sun and the planets... that hung in my office... the sun was suspended from a central rod... and the nine planets were dis-proportionately spaced around it... and if the air was quite still... the solar system hung perfectly motionless... no planetary rotation or revolving around the sun... but if I leaned in close... and blew just a gentle puff of air onto Pluto... then Neptune and Uranus would respond... and if I blew just a little bit harder... the whole solar system would begin to move and turn around... what happened to one part of it... was felt throughout...

I can't remember many of the details... I looked for it on YouTube... but there was a commercial on TV years ago... by the Mormon Church... of someone coming home after a rough day at work... and they kind-of bite the head off of the person who greets them at the door... and then that person snaps at someone else in the house... and then that person growls at grandma... poor grandma... it illustrates that everyone and everything is inter-connected... the family is like a mobile... what happens to one person... for good or bad... ripples throughout... one to another... but also out beyond our homes... into our neighborhoods... cities... state and country... and the world... and who knows... maybe even farther...

The intricacies... and subtleties... of these connections may be unfathomable... but to say that they don't exist... is to be foolish... for example... for years... the United States has played a decisive role in the global struggle against prejudice and discrimination that's particularly true in the battle against homophobia... which continues to literally destroy lives in many countries... so it came as a surprise... on June 11... when US

embassies around the world received instructions from Washington not to raise a rainbow flag during this month's Pride celebrations... and that may have emboldened Edward Terry of Overland, Missouri... to send an email on June 16... just five days later... to one of St. Louis' PRIDE planners... threatening to... "come to next weekend's PRIDE festival with my guns to kill every gay person I can... before I kill myself"... thank God... the FBI was called... and he was arrested...

The intricacies of these connections may be unfathomable... but to say there are none is to be foolish... for example... there were reports that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents would... this morning... begin rounding up migrant families in ten major cities... but at the last minute... that was delayed for two weeks... to see if Congress can work out a solution...

The ELCA Constitution [7.31.12 section A number 7] calls "every ordained minister to speak to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed... calling for justice... and proclaiming God's love for the world."...

And two days ago... the Episcopal Bishop of Chicago... Jeffrey Lee... wrote... *coupled with recent reports of inhumane and even deadly conditions in shelters for migrants on our southern border... the threat of these raids makes it difficult — not to conclude — that our immigration system is failing to operate with common humanity... or to embody the highest values of our country or its people...*

So when policies like this turn a blind eye to the resulting long term trauma which is likely caused... we can't be surprised if and when some of those children grow up with... and act on... strong anti-American sentiments...

The intricacies of these connections may be unfathomable... but to say there are none is to be foolish... for example... on Wednesday this week... the EPA rolled back previous plans limiting coal-fired power plant emissions... allowing states to set their

own standards for coal-fired power plants... while also on Wednesday... a scientist with the Danish Meteorological Institute... was in northwest Greenland to retrieve tools that measure climate change... when he ran into a problem... he couldn't see them... the usually flat... white sea ice was covered in several inches of water... the result of flooding from Greenland's ice sheet... the second largest ice sheet on the planet... Now Greenland does have an annual "melt season" with the bulk of the melting occurring in July... but massive amounts of ice have already been lost... weeks ahead of recent estimates...

Truth tellers... and whistleblowers... and those who listen... not to the voices of conformity... but to their own inner Spirit... are often demonized... and ostracized... and sometimes worse...

Many of us know stories... about families who ostracize... out of shame... those who don't quite fit in... and some of us know the story about Rosemary Kennedy... the third of Joseph and Rose Kennedy's nine children... born in 1918 Rosemary was mentally impaired and never quite fit in with her family... Timothy Shriver... Rosemary's nephew said... "The shame of her disability was our family secret. She grew up in a time where there was enormous shame surrounding children with special needs..."

About the demoniac... 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... about Rosemary Kennedy... prone to rages and running away in the middle of the night... she became increasingly more difficult to control as she grew older... and at age 23... Joe Kennedy... without telling his wife... scheduled a lobotomy... which went horribly wrong... and left Rosemary with limited motor and speech skills... she spent the next sixty years hidden from the public in a Wisconsin Catholic institution... where she was cared for by nuns... and she died there in 2005 at age 86... her father never visited her again... and her siblings rarely spoke of her...

About the demoniac... The Rev. Martin Smith writes... we shouldn't hesitate to call the lunatic whom Jesus cures... a kind of hero... sometimes... those who dramatically fall apart under the stress of intolerable social conditions are heroes... are scapegoats... they take on the suffering of a whole people... and their breakdown is a kind of terrible truth-telling... we encounter "heroes" like this living homeless on our streets... mirroring back to us the craziness of our broken social order...

Certainly... living under Roman occupation was no picnic... and this pitiful man who camped out naked in the town graveyard... dramatized his own people's predicament... he even calls himself Legion... an ironic reference to the Roman military garrison stationed nearby... that's 5,000 men... overkill for a town that was probably half that size... the author's intention may be affirmation that Jesus is stronger than the occupying forces of the Romans...

Rector Mike Kinman... of All Saint's Pasadena wrote... whether we view demons as actual spiritual entities... addictions... illnesses... or other things that are exercising power over us in unhealthy and evil ways... demons thrive on silence... when we don't name them... when we don't talk about them... when we pretend they don't exist... that's when we isolate ourselves... and they have the most power over us... Jesus meets demons head on... and in what may well be a bit of literary and poetic Jewish irony... it was into pigs... that the demons went... in the Roman province of Gennesaret... among those who worshipped the Roman gods...

We don't talk about demons much ... probably either because it's too scary or because they sound like superstition... we'd rather think of them as a literary device... but whether or not that is true... evil does exist... there is evil that we let have power over us... lies of our own unworthiness... powers of addiction... temptations and compulsions to hate... all those things which "draw us from the love of God"... and that lie to us about our own identity as God's beloved...

Jesus' arrival... signals the end of this awful victim identity as the gruesome mascot of a people under enemy occupation... the exorcism Jesus performs includes a frightful negotiation with the demons... and they dramatically self-destruct... highlighting how God's truth and light and love... always prevail... and Jesus calmly gets the man fitted out with borrowed clothes and sends him home... and his family must come to know him in his simple humanity and goodness... now that Jesus has set him free from the misguided need to function as the ghastly icon of their downtrodden community... and has relieved him of the burden of bearing alone... their unacknowledged communal pain...

Martin Niemöller was a prominent Lutheran pastor in Germany... he emerged as an outspoken foe of Hitler... and spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps... he is perhaps best remembered for his postwar words... which name some of this communal pain...

"First they came for the socialists... and I did not speak out — because I was not a socialist... then they came for the trade unionists... and I did not speak out — because I was not a trade unionist... then they came for the Jews... and I did not speak out — because I was not a Jew... then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me..."

Who are our scapegoats... what words can we substitute for Niemöller's... women?... people with disabilities?... African-Americans?... Mexicans?... Muslims?... LGBT people?... journalists?... judges?... where and how do we contain them... how do we restrain them... and what truths are they telling us that we really don't want to hear... about the craziness of our broken social order... like a mobile... the winds of change... may be gentle puffs of air... or they may knock us off our feet... and the intricacies... and subtleties... of these connections may be unfathomable... but to say there are none... is to be foolish... let's not be foolish...