

The Second Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 7C

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church/La Iglesia Episcopal de la Resurrección

Mount Vernon, WA

June 22. 2025

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Good morning! Today, with the baptisms of Forrest and Avery Rose, we will be marking the entry of two more members of Abraham's offspring and marking them "as Christ's own forever." These will be the sixth and seventh baptisms for Resurrección and Saint Paul's in the last month; the family continues to grow.

I do not remember my own baptism; I was seven months old. I remember my confirmation 10 years later and my ordination right here, in front of this altar, 43 years later. Continuing the journey that began 53 years prior and continues today. "For we are all sons and daughters of the Great Spirit through our trust in Creator Sets Free (Jesus)."¹

It is not our actions, our choices that free us from the Law; Jesus' faith justifies us. As Paul puts it, and it has been translated many ways, the NRSV gives us 'imprisoned and guarded' and that the 'law was our disciplinarian'. The Greek that is used points to an enslaved person who would accompany and guide the children until they reached adulthood, think au pair or babysitter. This is not something that the average working person would have. "[W]e are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into

Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” It is crucial to understand that the Greek *nomos*/law in Paul’s world means much more than Jewish law/Torah, which also covers customs, principles, laws of the universe, and specific laws. Like most cultural regulations, it makes a binary between them and us — Greek (Gentile) and Jew. While Paul speaks of God’s work to free us from the binary, he is not speaking of eliminating differences; after all, we are all given different gifts and called to use those gifts to serve God and our neighbor.

We have continuously failed to live up to these gifts and function in a binary way, as we fear the ‘other’ and set our culture to oppress and control them. Humanity is greatly diminished whenever the undocumented, the unemployed, the unhealthy, and others are excluded, uninvited, and unwelcome. When we choose those we deem as different, we create the binary that Paul and God oppose.

Which brings us to the person known as the Gerasene Demoniac, someone who stands in for someone society has chosen to deal with out of ignorance and fear. It is a story that those who first heard it understood better than we do, and probably loved it, and the Romans didn’t understand it. As one commentator puts it, “The whole scene is bizarre. You’ve got a naked guy acting bizarre, chatty demons, charging pigs doing swan dives, tombs, chains, shackles, freaked-out locals, and a small riot. All in Gentile territory where, as far as most Jews were concerned, Jesus had no business being in the first place.”

The Demoniac’s neighbors had chosen to keep him in line and control him and keep him out of sight, but it didn’t work. He broke the chains and ended up living naked among the tombs, away from everybody.

We have a different worldview than the First Century, putting experiences in other categories, labels, and descriptions. Except for reality TV, there is not much about demonic possession, but let us go with it. There is a definite political undertone here; the demons are called Legion, and a legion was the major unit of the Roman Army, consisting of about 5,000 men. One of the elite legions in Palestine had a boar's head as its symbol.

When Jesus heals this person, the townspeople find him "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, they were afraid." Their way of dealing with this person has been turned upside down; they have lost control and will have to deal with it. More frightening, this story, along with the prior storm and the healing of Jarius' daughter, to follow, points to a new center of power and the answer to a question Jesus will ask his disciples, and all disciples yet to come. "Who do you say that I am?" And they were afraid. The 'other' had been given his full life back from which he had been cut off.

Being clothed with Christ is not a new religion in opposition to Judaism but a new way, within the Messiah, for Jews and non-Jews to come together as mutual children of God (3:26) and Abraham's children and heirs. (3:29).

So welcome, Avery Rose, Forrest, and those baptized last month, to belonging to Christ. Remember that you are "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise, " and that you will inherit that promise.

1. First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New New Testament InterVarsity Press © 2021 by Rain Ministries, Inc.