

Pentecost 2, Year C,

Sermon by Rev. Glenn A. Brumbaugh

23rd June, 2019

Isaiah 65:1-9 NIV / Luke 8:26-39 NIV

What comes to mind when we think about a boundary?

Images of walls, fences, lines are probably some of the first things
that we think of when we hear that word.

We imagine some sort of barrier that divides one thing from another,
or a line that shows where one thing ends and another begins.

At the heart of our definition, is the concept of separation:

a boundary separates one thing from another.

Boundaries help us define our world.

They show us where our property ends and our neighbor's begins.

They help us organize and govern ourselves,

because we know where our community ends

and the next one begins.

Boundaries as barriers, like the many walls

that surround houses in Seattle, c

an help us keep “bad” things out or “good” things in.

I've talked before about how are brains are hard-wired

to put information we receive into boxes or categories.

We don't like the uncertain or unknown,

we like the security that boundaries provide.

However, while we may view boundaries as something necessary and positive,
the undeniable fact is they inherently also lead to separation.

Something is always kept inside boundaries,
while by definition other things are kept outside.

There is always an in and an out.

Boundaries can be physical such as walls and fence,
but they also can be within our own minds.

We can separate ourselves from others
based on religion, on ethnicity or race, economic status,
or any other hypothetical criteria we can imagine.

Everyone can be a “them” from our own individual perspective.

With boundaries, “I” can be here, and “they” are over there.

Jesus, in our gospel lesson this morning, leaves “here” to journey over “there.”

He leaves Jewish Capernaum and travels across the sea to Gentile Gerasene.

He leaves the safety and security of the familiar
for the strangeness and potential chaos of the foreign.

And he finds strangeness and chaos right off the bat.

Virtually the minute he steps on shore, he encounters a man who is in torment.

A man possessed by not one demon but may,
so many they are called “Legion.”

The demons of his world pushed him beyond the boundaries
of what his own people could tolerate.

They tried to constrain him within their walls,
but he broke those restrictions repeatedly
and found himself relegated to being naked and alone

in the desolate parts of his world.

Yet Jesus doesn't hide behind the walls where it's safe and secure.

He intentionally steps across the boundaries created by people for themselves.

He meets this poor man where he is,

and helps him deal with the demons that plague him,

the demons that recognize the threat that Jesus represents,

the one who is not afraid to confront them.

He lifts this man out of his dilemma and restores him to wholeness.

But such action, unfortunately, does not come without cost.

The swineherds that bore witness to these events

suffered a catastrophic economic loss.

Their entire herd was sacrificed in the process. They feared Jesus.

His actions had consequence for them, so much so they ask him to leave,

despite the fact they now know who he is.

Would our reaction be any different, or is our action any different?

We too, live in a world beset by demons.

Demons that lead us astray and consume us.

Forces of chaos out of our control that impact our lives like:

oppressive greed, addiction, prejudice and discrimination,

repression, mental illness, violence, the list goes on and on.

We too, have our own demoniacs, those who suffer from the demons of today:

the homeless, the refugee, the addict, the poor and hungry.

People who don't fit within our boundaries and find themselves on the outside,

in the desolation without.

Our world has it's own "legion," that palpable evil that can be found possessing many.

We see evidence throughout history and now:

concentration camps in Germany and internment camps here,

the ever present mass shootings

that sometimes seem to be an almost weekly event,

and neglected children in cages, here and now.

It should not be surprising that we want boundaries that keep evil out, but the question is,

does it keep it out, or does it keep it in and allow it to grow?

The demons of this world are largely of our own making.

When we have a society based on greed and consumerism,

the logical result is trying to accumulate more and more,

to satisfy a lust that is never satiated.

And in a world of limited resources,

that means that when some have much more,

others have much less.

When our solution to violence is to employ more violence, the net result is not peace.

Those walls and boundaries we erect do not give us the security we seek,

nor do we go without loss in the process.

In ancient China, the people desired security from the barbaric hordes to the north,

so they built the Great Wall of China.

It was so high they knew no one could climb over it

and so they thought that nothing could break it down.

They settled back to enjoy their security.

During the first 100 years of the wall's existence,

China was invaded three times.

Not once did the barbaric hordes break down the wall or climb over the top.

Each time they bribed a gatekeeper and then marched right through the gates.

The Chinese were so busy relying upon the walls of stone

that they forgot to teach integrity to their children.

The very demons that are the greatest threat are already among us.

But to confront those threats involves risk.

Like the swineherds in our story, we risk getting our piece of the pie.

We risk being outside our comfort zone and being in the presence

of those who are not like us,

people who have stripes to show from the demons of this world

that we prefer not to think about.

Like the Chinese who put their faith in the boundaries they established,

we suffer much more from the loss to our own integrity and souls.

Building walls often costs us exactly what we're trying to protect.

The story is told that years ago in Ireland a certain castle

was one of the architectural gems of the Emerald Isles. It was called Castle Wray.

The structure fell into disrepair and finally was uninhabited.

As often happens, peasants from nearby began to scavenge stones from it.

The stones had been cut and shaped with great craft,

and so they were excellent building materials.

Too, the peasants did not have to dig up the stones.

So, little by little, the Castle Wray was dismantled.

One day Lord Londonbury, the sole surviving heir of this Irish Castle, visited it.

He saw that the castle was being scavenged for its stones.

So he summoned his agent and ordered him to build

a six-foot-high stone wall around the castle.

Then he left, feeling that the castle would be safe from trespassers.

Three or four years later, the owner returned.

He found a six-foot wall, just as he had ordered. But there was no castle.

The castle had vanished. It had disappeared into thin air.

The owner summoned his agent

and asked why the agent had not carried out his order.

The agent insisted that he had indeed carried out the owner's order.

He had built the wall. The owner asked, "Then where is the castle?"

The agent replied, "Ah, is it for me, my Lord,

to be going all over Ireland picking up stone

when the finest stone in Ireland was right here in the castle?"

He had torn down the castle in order to build the wall.

That is the choice we face.

Do we stay inside the boundaries we set for ourselves,

and wallow idle in the false security they provide,

while that idleness and indifference costs us our integrity

or do we step across those boundaries, to lift up and welcome those without,

those who suffer from the demons we create?

As followers of Christ, idleness is not in our definition.

The Great Commission in Matthew calls us to reach the ends of the earth,

baptizing and proclaiming the gospel.

Since antiquity we have made the commitment in our baptismal vows

to combat the evil in the world.

In the act of communion, we symbolically join with Christ and each other

in supporting his mission in this world.

But as our gospel story shows with the Gerasenes,
the good news isn't always perceived as good news.

Some are not ready to risk the sacrifice accepting that good news entails.

But positive change rarely comes without risk, does it?

To rid ourselves of the demons that plague our world comes with potential cost.

Are willing to join with Jesus and step across those boundaries

to lift up those on the outside who suffer?

Are we willing to reach out and restore the demoniacs of today

to wholeness and identity, whatever identity that may be?

Will we get in the boat with Jesus, or will we choose to stay safely on the shore,

behind the boundaries we make for ourselves?

The choice is yours. Choose wisely. Amen.