

## Trinity 1 Sermon by Andrew 23 June 2019

### “An unanxious Presence”

Isaiah 65:1-9; Galatians 3: 23-29; Luke 8: 26-39

I said: “here I am, here I am”, to a nation that did not call upon my name. I held out my hands to a rebellious people who walk in a way that is not good.

The picture you get from our Isaiah reading is of God almost standing in the middle of a busy market place and he’s appealing to us, straining every sinew to get our attention. But the busy world just goes on rushing past. No-one stands still to listen.

I’m a big fan of Question Time on a Thursday night, but over the weeks I’ve found it more and more depressing. There’s shouting from the audience, panellists talking over each other, but no-one’s listening, and don’t start me on the Conservative leadership contest or just this week Donald Trump almost starting a war in the Gulf.

In a world of Twitter and Facebook and online everything 24/7 it’s almost like that host of discordant voices that the poor man in our Gospel has in his head all the time – we are Legion, for we are many. Isaiah confronts the people with a host of wrong choices that they’ve made, dead-end paths that lead to nowhere good, they make the wrong sacrifices, they’ve lost sight of what really matters.

The fact is that is if we don’t know who to listen to or where we’re heading, whether as a nation or as individuals, we end up hurting ourselves.

Poor Legion doesn’t know which way is up because his head is so full of discordant voices that he hurts himself, damages himself all the time, throwing himself around, gashing himself, breaking out of the restraints people put on him to try and save him from himself. Everyone is afraid of him because he’s threatening and risky to be around, a danger to everyone else and to himself. Everyone is anxious about him. Except one man – Jesus. He’s the only one who isn’t anxious.

In the Gospel, this poor man is well known and everybody is anxious about him – hence the chains, the shackles, the guards. They’ve probably known him all his life. I once had a young man turn up on my doorstep dripping with blood because he’d gashed himself across the throat and when I whizzed him round the corner to the doctor’s surgery the nurse took one look at him and just said, with a big sigh – oh, it’s you again. He’d been the disturbed problem kid in that community from the time he went to nursery. Everyone had him labelled, just like the Gerasenes had this man labelled.

But here is Jesus, the only unanxious presence in this scenario. And suddenly Legion knows him and even names him: Jesus, Son of the most high God. In the presence of this

peaceful man all of that confusion even names itself: Legion, a chorus of voices from the deepest darkness. Legion recognises that there's something profoundly different about the man who's standing in front of him. The presence of Jesus is healing because Jesus spends time every day where he listens to one voice only. And because of that he is a completely different kind of human being. He's heard the voice of God, he knows the voice of God, the one who promises a peace beyond understanding, and because of that his very presence can heal the troubled soul. He is soaked in God, so that when he speaks, people hear God. No wonder the demons are afraid.

"He speaks with authority and not like our scribes", the people say. "Come and see someone who told me everything I ever did", says the Samaritan woman at the well, doing her absolute best to keep Jesus from knowing her, but in the end totally unable to ignore his look of understanding (not without a sense of humour either in her case) or his voice of compassion and wisdom. Peter: Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life.

And Jesus can be that kind of presence for us. When our heads are buzzing and we're worried about what to do, can we invite him in and hear his word of peace. Just like he calmed the storm with a word and gave Legion back to himself, a whole human being, can we put ourselves in a place of stillness where he can do the same for us.

The voice of God we hear through Paul in Galatians talks about us being clothed in Christ. Legion appears in our Gospel unclothed because he rips the clothes off his back in his distress; but by the end, he's clothed, his dignity is restored and he's clothed in his right mind. Jesus gives him back to himself, back to the people who love him, back to his community as a restored human being.

Yesterday afternoon I marched with other Christians and a couple of thousand other people in Edinburgh's Pride march – a veritable rainbow spectrum of what human beings look like. And there were families and firemen, and groups from insurance companies and banks and travel firms, and some of us carried banners which proclaimed "God loves all". For many on the march, for many of us in so many ways, hearing that Good News of God's love can take a lifetime. We marched past John Knox's house and I couldn't help wondering what John Knox would have thought. But these were the children of God revelling in God's gift of freedom.

But the message and mission of the God who says "I am here, I am here", whether you're Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, whatever your race or orientation or anything else about you, is to say "Turn to me, hear my voice – and I will give you back to yourself. I will reclothe you in your rightful mind and I will lead you into life." God says: "I am here, turn to me, listen..."