**Sermon for Sunday 19th June CCHB 8.30am and 10am**

**Texts:-**

**Isaiah 65:1-9**

**Luke 8:26-39**

**Theme:-**

**Jesus is our salvation. We are to witness this to others**

**Prayer:-**

**May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever pleasing in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer**

**Amen**

**Introduction**

**I am sure that we all have difficult times in our lives when we question:- Why is this happening to me?**

Many of you already know that I have suffered with anxiety and depression, in the past, for many years.

Those of you who have also had a similar experience, I am sure would agree that this is a devastating and debilitating condition.

**There were many times when I questioned God.:-**

Why me?

Why is this happening to me?

**I think that we may find some answers in this passage from Luke’s Gospel in which Jesus heals the man of Gerasenes.**

**Picture the scene**

**Jesus and his disciples had just sailed across the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore.**

Why he did this – we do not know. Possibly to escape the crowds and find some peace.

Point is that although many Jews did live there, this was essentially gentile territory.

If Jesus was seeking peace, unfortunately, he did not find it as they were confronted by a wild man who was shouting and screaming!

**So who was he and how did Jesus react?**

The man was obviously violent and dangerous with superhuman strength, as we are told that he broke the chains that restrained his hands and feet.

He was living, naked, among the tombs which were believed to be the home and haunt of demons.

Jesus seemingly remained calm – just as he was recently when he quelled the storm which threatened to capsize their boat on the Sea of Galilee – he commands the ‘impure spirits’ to come out of the man and asks the man who he is.

**The man replies that his name is Legion.**

**It is interesting to note that the word ‘Legion’ has now passed into our current vocabulary –** we take it to mean ‘many’. The man would have witnessed the legions of Roman soldiers made up of thousands of men and felt that this described his condition. He felt that he was in the thrall of ‘many’ demons. **Today we would probably identify him as suffering from a form of mental illness**.

We hear that after Jesus had commanded the impure spirits to leave the man, he gave them permission to enter a herd of pigs grazing on the hillside.

The fact that pigs were there at all indicates that they were in gentile territory, as Jews believed that pork was unclean.

So – poor pigs! The demons entered the pigs who then rushed over the cliffs to their deaths!.

**It would seem rather cruel of Jesus to kill the pigs! However – William Barclay offers another explanation:-**

He suggests that the pigs may have been spooked by all the screaming and shouting and ran amok to get away, blindly falling over the cliff in their panic – Jesus may have felt that the man Legion needed convincing that he was cured and just pointed, handily, to the pigs as if to say ‘Look the demons have deserted you and gone into those pigs!’

**We shall never know!**

**The point is that Legion was healed and was discovered wearing clothes and in his right mind.**

**So what is significant about this story?**

**What does Luke want us to understand?**

**I think the answer is in the last verse when Jesus says to Legion:-**

***‘Return home and tell how much God has done for you’***

**What can we make of this?**

**I said at the beginning that I have suffered from anxiety and depression for many years and have questioned God ‘Why me’?**

**‘Why is this happening to me’?**

**I now tend to counter those questions by saying instead ‘Why not’**

**Jesus has never promised us an easy life**

**I don’t think that God deliberately gives us a hard time –** although we all suffer adversity in our lives at some point – it could be illness, financial difficulties, relationship problems and so on…

But he has promised to be with us, in the form of Jesus, and help us through. Jesus has said:-

***‘My yoke is easy and my burden is light’***

Meaning that we are not given more than we can cope with.

**Over a period of years I have managed to combat my anxiety and depression – with lots of help along the way**

**I felt called to train as a lay minister and was licensed as a Reader, nearly 15 years ago!**

**At one time, in the past, I was unable to even leave my house without having a panic attack.**

**I certainly never would have imagined that I would ever have the confidence to stand here and preach to you!**

**I mention this because:-**

In 1995 I had a serious accident while on holiday in Cornwall – I fell down a steep flight of stairs breaking some ribs, fracturing one elbow and puncturing a lung.

I ended up in hospital in Penzance having an emergency operation.

The Dr said I could easily have been killed.

**The point is that as I was falling a distinct thought flashed through my mind which was:-**

***‘I know that I am going to be seriously injured, but I am not going to die because there is something important I still have to do’***

**Gosh! – what on earth was it?**

Obviously, I did survive – I became stronger physically and mentally, and in 2004 embarked on my training for lay ministry!

**I suspect that this might be it!! Maybe the ‘important thing’ is to bear witness to my healing??**

**Jesus tells Legion:-**

***‘Return home and tell what God has done for you’***

**I think that the message Luke is getting across is that of witness.**

**We are required to tell others, on our home territory, what God has done for us.**

**It is interesting in this passage that Jesus and God are both linked – We have just been contemplating the mystery of the Holy Trinity:- God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – on Trinity Sunday, last week…..**

**So - May I now pose this question to you:-**

**What do you think that God has done for you?**

It may not be anything dramatic or necessarily involve healing but anything that may have helped you through a hard time. Maybe people have come alongside you to help or you have found inner strength in coping with adversity.?

**St Paul in his letter to the Romans famously says:-**

*‘And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose’* Romans 8:28

In other words whatever difficulties we may endure, our experiences can be put to good use, if we believe and trust in God.

**I was at the Gladstone Theatre last weekend** and sat next to a lady who turned to me and said’ *Isn’t it wonderful to be getting back to normality again?*

She was, of course, referring to the restrictions which we have been experiencing because of the pandemic

I think we are now appreciating things more, like trips to the theatre, which we may have taken for granted before! A number of us went to Theatre Clwyd on Friday evening, organised by Graham loach, it was great and enjoyed by all.

**Is this something that we can thank God for?**

**As a result of my learning to cope with anxiety and depression I have also been able to help others with similar problems.**

**Ted Jones and I founded the Oasis Well Being Support Group, at this church 12 ½ years ago, which is still going strong, with our monthly meetings.**

**Conclusion**

We have heard how Jesus was able to heal the man Legion

We understand that he wants both Legion – and us as Christians – to tell others ‘What God has done for us’

We may be the only Christian in the shop, the office, the school, the factory, the circle in which we live and work. This is our challenge today, in which God says

***‘Go and tell the people you meet every day what I have done for you’***

**Amen**