

## **2019 06 23 – An Inconvenient Exorcism**

**Luke 8:26-39**

“And they were afraid... Panic overcame the whole population of the region of the Gerasenes, and they asked Jesus to leave them.”

Fear plagues us. Our lives are too often controlled by fear: fear of the unknown, fear of the other, fear of change, fear of what others will think, fear of the truth.

On Friday afternoon over the past couple weeks our Faith Formation Committee has invited us to watch a film called “Conspiracy of Silence.” This film is the story of the murder of Helen Betty Osborne and it highlights the many ways that fear got in the way of truth and justice. Betty was living in The Pas, Manitoba so that she could attend high school, since this educational opportunity was not available on her First Nations reserve at Norway House. On November 13, 1971, in the early hours of the morning, as Betty was walking home from a party, she was abducted by four young white men and brutally murdered.

It took sixteen years before someone was actually convicted of this horrific crime. Even then, only one of the four men actually went to prison. A few years later a commission conducted an investigation into how this case was handled and determined that “the most significant factors prolonging the case were racism, sexism and [the] indifference of white people.”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen\\_Betty\\_Osborne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Betty_Osborne)

It became obvious that many people in The Pas knew what had happened but were afraid to come forward. Even members of the RCMP were reluctant to dig deep into the facts of the case. Some people were afraid of what would happen to those four young white men. Some were afraid of being hurt or killed themselves if they talked. Some were afraid of how “the other,” the indigenous people in their town, might react if the truth came out. Others were afraid of the news media and what the rest of the country would think. So instead of sharing what they knew, they stayed silent. And they lived their lives for over a decade burdened with the weight of their secrets and indifferent to Betty and her family and their need for truth and justice.

How often do we ignore the path to salvation, to justice, to healing, to peace, because we are afraid? How often do we choose to ignore what we know is wrong because it’s easier to just look the other way? How often do we spend money and energy keeping the pain in ourselves and in our society locked up in darkness rather than exposing it to the light so the difficult path to health and wholeness can begin?

Jesus was a teacher and a healer and he wasn’t afraid to expose and to transform even the sharpest pain, the ugliest blemish, the deepest secret. When he stepped off the boat in the region of the Gerasenes, the first person he saw was a man who was naked and mentally unwell. Jesus could easily have ignored him. He could have turned and walked away from this person who was obviously “the other.” Jesus could have taken notice of the scars on the man’s

arms and legs and suggested that someone shackle and hide him again. But he didn't.

Jesus chose instead to heal this man, to make him whole. He ordered the evil spirits to leave his body and allowed them to enter a herd of swine instead. The pigs immediately rushed down the hillside into the lake and were drowned. The swine herders shared this disturbing news with their neighbours and soon everyone in the area knew what had happened. Many came to see for themselves.

It is the neighbours' reactions that I find most troubling. It's true that the exorcism that Jesus performed was inconvenient: a farmer's income was lost and those who had been guarding the demoniac were no doubt out of a job. But you would think that the Gerasenes would marvel at Jesus' healing power and invite him to come and perform his miracles in their own homes and villages. You would think that they would be excited to listen to Jesus' words and find out more about his Spirit, the sacred power that enabled him to exorcise demons. But the scripture tells us that they saw "the exorcised person sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and of a right mind. And they were afraid." Not just afraid, but very afraid. In fact they panicked and asked Jesus to get back into his boat and leave them.

What were they afraid of? Were they afraid of the demoniac, that he wasn't really healed and that he would suddenly rise up and attack them? Were they afraid because of the drowned pigs; was it economic loss that was at issue? Or were they afraid of Jesus? Were they afraid of the power that he possessed?

Were they afraid that his power would somehow unearth their own demons?

Were they afraid that this man and his God would turn the world that they knew upside down?

Fear plagues us. The Gerasenes' reaction to Jesus was very similar to the way that the folks in The Pas reacted when a new constable arrived in their town and started asking questions about a murder that had happened over a decade before. There was lots of fear about how the actions of this justice-seeking individual were going to impact the reputation and the economic well-being of their little town. At one point in the movie it seemed as if this constable might even lose his job and be asked to leave.

Fear plagues us. But the good news is that healers and justice-seekers are still alive and well in our country and in our world. The Truth & Reconciliation Commission and the Commission on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls have done their work and their reports and their recommendations are available for all of us to read. We may not want to know the long-held secrets that they contain, but we can no longer hide from the truth that they reveal.

We are called to move past our fear and to have faith and trust in the love and the healing power of the Holy Mystery. We are called to follow Jesus and to be healers and justice-seekers ourselves. We are called to look beyond the inconvenience, the costs of the changes that healing and justice can bring. We are called to trust in the healing power of the God of Love, the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being.