

## **Pentecost 2, Proper 7C. Baptisms of Isaiah and Solomon Swanson. June 23, 2019.**

Today is a baptism day. We are baptizing Isaiah and Solomon Swanson at Wiggle Worship, and whenever we have a baptism at any liturgy, all the services join with the baptized as one body renewing our baptismal covenant. These baptisms are a great gift to us. They should remind us of our own baptisms, of that great chorus of yes that accompanies any baptism. God's yes is first, of course, the great yes accepting us as part of the family of God. And we or our parents respond with littler but still mighty yeses, deeply glad to put on Christ and join this strange community. And finally the church says yes to all of this: yes to the child and the claims they make on us, yes to God's saving love for us, and yes again to our vows first made perhaps a long time ago.

Part of what happens in a baptism is that a person joins the church, which, for better or worse, is us. And so one of the reasons we all renew our baptismal covenant is to remind ourselves of what it means to be the church—to call ourselves to be worthy of the task given to us: being the community to which God has entrusted these new Christians. And we need this reminder desperately because it is so easy these days for our lives to become defined by what we are against. Constant outrage, over time, narrows us. It demeans us, when we become dominated by what we abhor. Today with Solomon and Isaiah we assert again what we are for, we sing again the affirmations that make us who we are.

We are the people who have been set free by Jesus. I'm afraid that in the terms of our gospel reading today, that sets us with the long-term nudist demoniac who lives in the tombs. On the brighter side, there are worse characters to be. I mean, at least we're not the drowned pigs. We are the people who have been set free by Jesus, and who are called to join in his liberating work. Today's story gives us several clues about what that might look like.

The way our text starts makes it seem perfectly natural that Jesus and his friends are in Gerasa. They just arrive there as the story gets going. But Gerasa is a strange place for them to have gone. It is Gentile territory, and Jesus gives no rationale for going there. A few verses before this passage, he just gets in the boat in Galilee and says, "let's go to the other side of the lake." It's a hard journey across the lake; the disciples encounter a storm on the water that almost overwhelms them before someone thinks to wake Jesus up and he calms the waters. And they're going to a place where they will be strangers, where they don't have social credit, among a foreign people, where many of their assumptions will be wrong. It's a bit like us going to Mexico or that even stranger place, downstate Illinois. They arrive, he delivers this man, and then they are asked to leave and they go back home. Here's the thing: I'm pretty sure that the whole point of this dangerous, costly, uncomfortable journey is to save this one bound, occupied man.

Now, we have been set free by a God who will never stop seeking us among the tombs we keep wandering into. We have been set free by a God who confronts the legions who would try to seize and dominate us. But also, we have been called to follow that God, to join in the work that Jesus is still doing. And that is always going to mean being willing to leave our comfort zones, to go where we are not in control, to join Jesus in confronting forces that are sometimes terrifyingly powerful. It means taking risks and accepting danger. It means the just plain old inconvenience of crossing the lake to reach that one guy, nothing like us, that everyone else has given up on.

This is the life into which we are baptizing Isaiah and Solomon: a life in community that says yes to God's love and understands that God's yes must be shared. That when God has set us free we, like our demoniac forefather, have to proclaim by word and example what God has done for us. A life that is willing to brave a storm to get to the other side of the lake for the stranger who is suffering. A life driven by the love that it is for, and not the hate that it encounters. And we get to teach them this life. We get to teach them what the love of God will dare to do. May we be up to the job. Amen.