

Lee Abbey Retreat

Crossing an unknown sea

Reflection 3: 'The other side' – faith on the edge

Daily prayer of turning and away and towards – to help us settle and focus.

.... I turn to Christ



Today's reflection is on a story of human storms and brokenness – in a world that sets up boundaries, excludes and isolates.

Meditation

You call me out upon the waters
The great unknown where feet may fail
And there I find You in the mystery
In oceans deep
My faith will stand

And I will call upon Your name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise, my soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours and You are mine

Your grace abounds in deepest waters
Your sovereign hand
Will be my guide
Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me
You've never failed and You won't start now
From: Oceans (Where Feet May Fail). Hillsong

Reading: They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; ⁷ and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with

him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed. Mk 5.1-20

Notes

Border crossing

A strange place to come to shore. Gentile. Unclean. Godless.

Seas are borders – between regions, between peoples.

Following Jesus meant arriving in very strange places and situations. We do not always know what is going on or where it will lead.

We are here because Jesus is there. We are simply followers.

Multiple borders - religious, racial, clean/unclean, light/darkness, life/death, God and evil.

The man - unknown, unnamed - there because his own community cast him out.

Human borders of human fear, prejudice, cruelty and ignorance.

But he keeps breaching those borders.

So does Jesus! He crosses to this 'other side'.

Jesus is revealed as one who breaks the borders of prejudice and oppression and the grip of what has become terrible evil. He is a deliverer.

When the crowds arrive

He is with Jesus – 'seated, clothed and in his right mind'.

Another storm has been stilled - at the word and will of Jesus

What might that be like for you?

Those who have known journeyed with significant mental or spiritual oppression will know what this means. The utter gift of it.

And as we journey through the stresses and demands of this lockdown it might be our prayer. That Jesus will breach the borders of isolation and threat and bring us too to a place where we are seated, clothed and in our right mind.

Centred on Jesus

The man comes running to him and bows down.

The demons are fixed on him

The local people 'came to Jesus' (vs 15).

Naked, agonised, among the tombs, outside the city – the cross of Jesus.

And God's love crosses every border into the depths of human need and dereliction.

Throughout the gospels Jesus is always crossing boundaries, breaking down barriers and healing the terrible damage they cause.

This is where he is in our world. In this pandemic where borders and boundaries are being rigidly imposed for the sake of our mutual health we are being constantly challenged about what kind of society we are called to be.

Faith pushed to the margins.

Jesus is begged to leave - They lockdown. Borders are re-built ...

But not completely

Jesus sends the man to tell of the mercy of God - to go on breaching the borders.

This man as an image of the calling of the church?

God's faithful people are always communities on the edge.

The church is found where Jesus, and the gospel, has been marginalised.

We are border people.

Where Jesus is. Telling of his mercy.

Reflections

What aspects of this story particularly speak to you?

What people in the story do you most identify with?

Does this image of crossing borders suggest ways of living and praying your faith at this time – for you and for the God's people?

Praying with the story

Perhaps your life feels as if it has come to shore in a strange, unfamiliar and possibly threatening land?

Can you imagine yourself coming to this shore led and guided by Jesus? He walks ahead of you. You are not alone. Stay close to him.

Talk to Jesus about how all this feels.

Tell him your burden and questions.

Imagine that man with Jesus – 'seated, clothed and in his right mind'.

It is an image of final wholeness, healing and security.

Stay a while with this image.

Imagine it as Jesus's loving gift to *you* in the midst of your life at this time.

Use it as a way of praying for others in particular need at this time – imagine them there too, sitting beside Jesus.

'Lead us. Heavenly Father, lead us, o'er this world's tempestuous sea.'

Note: This story needs reading with sensitivity. We are society with a growing sensitivity towards issues of mental health and wholeness that successive lockdowns and fears of Covid are adding to. Here is a prayer for our times

Lord, who crossed boundaries of isolation and gave new wholeness and life to the man called Legion. We pray for those experiences of those with mental health problems at this time. We think particularly of those who are depressed, anxious, struggling and isolated.

Lord, Legion was abandoned and oppressed by his community. And we too are part of a society that lacks care and easily excludes those struggling with mental health. Help us to cross the borders of our fear ignorance and prejudice. with you that we don't add to their difficulties through.

Lord in these demanding times, we especially pray for those in the health and social care professions – who cross boundaries with their care and offer healing and love. Lord, bring us all to that place– seated, clothed and in our right minds before you - in the new community of love and wholeness that is your Kingdom.