

**A Sermon for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost
June 22, 2025**



Rev. Barbara Bond
New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH

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[Second Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Luke 8: 26-39

Demons

This is really a bizarre story, don't you think? Jesus performs an exorcism, sends the demons off into a herd of pigs who all go crashing over a cliff and drown.

I find the most poignant moments are when we hear about the man with the demons.

What is a demon anyway? In Bible talk, it usually signified mental illness. Someone who couldn't deal with accepted reality was shunned and put away from sight. This man, let's call him Steve, was naked and living in the tombs, among the dead. He had been deprived of clothing, of community with the living, and had been banished from society. At some point, he was kept under guard, bound in chains and shackles, and was helpless. The demons inside his head called themselves "Legion," which in Roman times meant a whole lot of them, and they had come from the abyss to possess poor Steve.

Lack of understanding, lack of compassion, helplessness in the face of the incomprehensible – all these reactions come into play in poor Steve's interactions with so-called normal people, until Jesus comes and confronts the demons themselves. Once the demons have been banished, Steve is found clothed, in his right mind, and sitting at Jesus' feet. His mental illness has been healed.

Our society often fears what it does not understand. I am reminded of the 19th century novel *Jane Eyre* – when a mentally-ill woman is shut up in the attic, kept out of sight, until she burns down the mansion. Hiding the mentally ill isn't necessarily a good plan. Neither is shutting them up in institutions – we tried that uncompassionate resource for a long time, ultimately releasing most of the mentally ill into the streets, whence our homelessness phenomenon grew like a rampaging herd of pigs. We still haven't figured out the best treatments – psychotropic drugs are often used with some success, enabling the ill to live in group homes or more peacefully in their family homes.

More and more of us will be facing these challenges as we age. It is not an accident that I named the man in the story Steve. That is my brother's name, a 75-year-old formerly brilliant engineer who has been in cancer treatment for about five years. He is

in remission from the cancer, but he is slipping deeper and deeper into dementia, possibly the result of the rather brutal anticancer treatments, or maybe it is just happening as early onset Alzheimer's. I find the situation incredibly sad, and I know that it is not that unusual.

Sometimes I learn from our secular culture, when poignant examples have happy endings. One Disney movie I enjoy is called Encanto. Perhaps you have seen it. It is colorful, wildly fast-moving, and poignant all at the same time, and does offer a solution of love and acceptance, much as Jesus offers the man in our Gospel story. In the movie, a large and colorful family lives in a magical house in Columbia, South America. Their family story began when the matriarch, now known as Abuela (Grandmother) was seeking a better life for her little family – babies who were triplets, a husband who led the migrants to a new place. The husband was killed, but the family found a safe place with all the children growing and receiving gifts that fit their personalities – well, all of them received gifts except a granddaughter named Mirabel. And one of the grandmother's triplets mysteriously disappears – he is named Bruno, and the whole family is afraid to talk about him. "We don't talk about Bruno –no – no –no!" Bruno turns out to have been gifted in an unusual way, having visions that the family did not want to hear about. Bruno was banished. But Mirabel finds him – he is living in the walls of the house, among the rats – and she brings him out, at the same time showing compassion for all the family members who are way over-stressed in demonstrating their gifts. Bruno comes back to the family, is accepted and cherished, and the family can accept their own limitations. Good story.

Can we learn to be accepting of differences, offering love instead of fear? When we pray, can we keep in mind and offer to God all those who suffer from mental illness? Can we be sensitive to all the demons that afflict our society right now, and pray for the redemption of the whole society?

ADDENDUM: (The Episcopal Minute)

As I reflect on my sermon, I remember another incident that is perhaps pertinent. Some

background: My mother's brother was schizophrenic, and she worked very hard to keep him away from us. Hence, I was always a little afraid of people with that diagnosis. Some thirty years ago I was a hospital chaplain in Boise, Idaho, the only chaplain on duty one evening, when a schizophrenic man showed up in the Emergency Room asking to see a chaplain. And so I went to see him, with some trepidation. We talked quietly. Then he asked, "Do you see the wounds on my hands, on my feet, on my side? Do you think perhaps I might be Jesus Christ?" I responded gently, "I think it is not likely." He accepted that answer and went on his way. But now I reflect on that moment and wonder, Was he indeed Jesus Christ to me?