**19th June 2022**

**Call to worship**

Children of God,
give praise to our God who loves you.
All who are broken and bruised,
glorify our God who will grant you peace.
All who are healed and restored,
stand in awe of our God who has and will transform your life.
Come now and worship.

**A gathering prayer**

Healing Lord,
we come with wounds that often only you know;
we bring weariness and fears as well as hopes and aspirations.
Heal us and refresh us; restore your image in us.
In the name of Jesus we pray. **Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

Let us praise the Lord.
Seek and be satisfied.
Proclaim his name for he will never fail us.
Let our hearts honour and worship him.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

Almighty, powerful God,
who is full of compassion,
who rescues us from danger,
who strengthens the weak,
who feeds the poor:
**we bow down and honour your name.**
Almighty, powerful God,
who brings hope and healing,
who hears our cry,
whose heart feels our pain,
who heals us inside and out:
**we bow down and honour your name.
Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

Lord, how the world needs your healing. We think of the blight of plastic polluting our rivers and oceans, or the distress of creatures on the verge of
extinction, the scars of climate change and the sufferings inflicted by conflict. Forgive us if we unwittingly play any part in these things. Show us what we can do to help bring change in the world.
Lord, hear us.
**Lord, mercifully hear us.**

Lord, there are so many forms of pain and suffering. How we need your healing hand. Forgive us: when the pull of social media is so great that we stray into wrong territory; for pain we inflict by choosing to follow our own paths and schemes; or when we think ourselves to be better than others, or allow differences to separate us. Your healing hands are always open. Forgive us when we ignore them, whether through fear, ignorance or self-will.
Lord, hear us.
**Lord, mercifully hear us.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

There is so much sin and pain in our broken world.
But when we journey with Jesus,
we find forgiveness and healing.
We are all one in Christ Jesus,
who has forgiven our sins
and leads us into eternity with him.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

We thank you, Lord, for the journeys of healing you take us all
on. Whether we begin with baby steps or great strides, thank
you for walking with us at the pace we can cope with.
We thank you for your healing peace on those fleeing conflict
in this damaged world.
We thank you for your healing presence when illness and
brokenness drive us into solitary places, physically or mentally.
We thank you for your healing strength in times of stress, or
when we feel vulnerable and in need of support.
What a transformation you bring about in us, Lord, radiating
from the inside out; you offer us many blankets of blessing.
And thank you for the opportunities to share the story of your
healing with those who only know us healed.
**Our hearts swell with thankfulness and joy for all your
blessings. Amen.**

**SUPER DAD**

**What would we hope Super Dad could do?**

**Praying for Dads**

Father of all, we thank you for your loving kindness and care for us.
Thank you for giving us families, to mirror your love and to teach us to love others.
We thank you especially today for our fathers and all that they do for us.
Bless them and uphold them, that they may be shining examples of fatherhood
and reflect your love to their children.
We ask this in the name of your Son, our Brother and our Lord, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Lord God, you are the perfect Father to us all.
Bless all fathers in the world today.
Give them love, to share with their children.
Give them wisdom, to teach their children.
Give them courage, when the job seems hard.
Give them patience, when things don't go to plan.
Give them strength, to carry their children when they are tired or frightened.

Give them humility to admit failure and ask for forgiveness when they mess up or don’t live up to expectations.
Give them love, to share with their children, and let it be enough.
Amen.

Dear God
We pray for all children whose fathers have died, or whom they do not see any more.
We pray for any children who are frightened of their fathers.
Please bless and protect these precious children, and help them to know your healing love.
Amen.

**Luke 8.26-39**

Jesus encounters and dramatically heals a man possessed by many demons. The man is transformed from someone naked and who appeared frightening, into someone ‘clothed and in his right mind’. The local community are fearful and ask Jesus to leave. Jesus tells the man who was healed to tell everyone what God has done for him.

What relevance does this story, and Jesus’ healing ministry in general, have for the world of today? How does it impact and challenge the way we live?

Part of this story is the restoration of this man back to who he was: ‘clothed and in his right mind’.

 A little boy asked his father, ‘Daddy, where did I come from?’

The embarrassed father gulped and proceeded to go into a long winded explanation of the birds, the bees, the stork and anything else he could think of. Finally the red faced and perspiring father turned to his son and asked him ‘Why do you want to know where you came from?’

‘Oh’ his son replied, ‘there’s a new kid at school and he’s from Birmingham, and I just wondered where I came from?’

Our families give us identity and sometimes prestige and status. A father had just learned of his daughter’s plans to get married to some guy that she barely knew. So, her father asked her ‘does he have any money? His daughter replied, ‘Men are all alike … that’s exactly what he asked about you!

Family identity and fatherhood is changing. A sign of that was the change in the OXO family. For 18 years Britain had followed the OXO family through various meal-centred stages of their life together. But as the new century dawned Oxo announced that the advert series had run its course, because the image of mum and Dad and three children sitting round a dining table ‘no longer reflected the average family. There was the need, we were told, to move with the times and portray home life in a far more varied way.

Certainly modern family life is very different from what it was 50 years ago and debate can be had over whether that has been a good thing or a bad thing. We can be over romantic and selective about the past. I would argue that some developments have been positive – parents taking joint responsibility in the raising of children, the possibility of victims being able to get out of abusive family situations, the empowerment and dignity that have been given to women, greater tolerance of diversity within society and understandings of sexuality and gender.

We can’t return to the past. However we shouldn't be complacent about the pain and brokenness that accompanies so much of many people’s family life’s experiences today and the pressures of family life and identity have probably never been greater nor come from so many areas.

The man in this story had been isolated and rejected by his family and community. He lived outside the town, in the tombs. Sadly, there are family members who are ignored, isolated, rejected for whatever reason. When that happens of course it will affect someone’s identity, self-esteem and well-being.

In the gospel story the reason for that isolation and rejection is put down to being demon possessed. In our secular and materialistic society such explanations are problematic for some. Some commentators have seen this story as an analogy. The bizarre scene with the pigs ( a sign that this is taking place in Gentile territory, a non Jewish area of Galilee, (Jews didn’t eat or keep pigs) has sometimes been seen as picture language for what many Jews , and the other inhabitants of the region including perhaps the possessed man, wanted to do with the hated foreign Romans; drive them back into the sea. To dismiss a regiment or legion, the word used here for the number of demons in the man, is comparable to a legion of Roman soldiers. A dream of several revolutionary leaders in the first century to expel the brutal empire from their territory. I’m sure the Ukrainians would likewise use this analogy to get rid of the Russians from their territory.

We might say that the man had been traumatized by military occupation, his psychosomatic condition evidence of the way social problems become visible on the body (see Suzanne O’Sullivan, *The Sleeping Beauties: And Other Stories of Mystery Illness*, Picador 2021)[[1]](#endnote-1), if we are trying to find a rational explanation for this story.

Personally I keep an open mind. In my own ministry and in the experiences of some of the members of our prayer team , there has been situations that have been difficult to rationalize. Wise discernment is always needed. Many people who have been troubled by spiritual happenings do keep quiet about them for fear of being seen as weird in our society. In other parts of the world where they are more accepting and open to the spiritual world those kinds of things are normalized. If you are troubled by spiritual forces then do speak to me or a member of our prayer team. You will get a hearing and not be dismissed as weird.

We know very little about the man whom Jesus healed. We are given a picture of before and after and it is quite a contrast. We do not have an in-depth explanation as to why he behaved in the way he did. That may well be the case with people we encounter in contemporary society who have health issues. We may experience their impact but have no understanding of their context.

Jesus did not judge. He simply got alongside the man, and through his caring the man’s life was transformed. He was healed. Jesus did not wait to be asked. He instinctively knew what was needed and reacted accordingly.

It can’t have been much of a life. When they could the townsfolk locked the man up, as best they could; but somehow and often he managed to escape. He didn’t conform to any societal norms. He probably had no idea of hygiene, and he didn’t bother with clothes. We are not told what he thought about all this. Simply that he was rejected and, where possible, ignored. And because he was different, people were a little bit frightened of him.

Those who are different can be unsettling, whether it is because of the way they dress or the way they speak or what they wear. But is that really a good reason to sideline or ignore them?

Looking at the text: He didn’t ask for healing. If anything, he seemed to be scared of it. He tried to ask Jesus what he wanted of him or at least the voice that came from him cried out. Jesus seems to approach the man and command his healing immediately. He commands the healing by calling out the unclean spirit. But this spirit – or these spirits – answer back. They do not want to return to the abyss. The abyss is the hell from which they originated. This is almost a plea for healing. It is as if they want to avoid the torment of the abyss at any cost and in a sense that is because they are seeking to be healed.

Here are two contrasting impacts that encounters with Jesus bring. The first is wholly positive, in that the man is restored and made whole. The second is more difficult. The destruction of the pigs must have been a financial disaster for the swineherds. This is a reminder that encounters with Jesus can be costly and have unforeseen consequences.

The people have at best an ambivalent reaction to Jesus. He has robbed some of the community of their livelihood. But he has restored health to the man whom they believed to be possessed.

The unfolding story of the government policy of sending refugees to Rwanda reveals a deep division between supporters and opponents. Sometimes one side simply has to give way. There is a division of feeling in the gospel passage between those rejoicing at the demoniac’s healing and the pig farmers who have lost their animals. This can be seen as a friction between health and economics. In the same way the debate concerning the refugees can be seen as the plight of a few individuals against the greater good. Jesus comes down in favour of health and wholeness and his actions support one individual.

In sending the man home Jesus does two things. First, he completes the restoration begun in the healing by restoring the man back into his community. Second, he uses the man to show a Gentile community that the love of God is for them as well. It is a glimpse of what Paul envisaged when he wrote that there is no longer Jew nor Greek.

The man had been rejected by his community. He was quite literally living on the edge. When he was healed, he begged that he might go with Jesus. However, Jesus refused his plea and sent him back to his own community.

He is one of those for whom Jesus did not say ‘follow me’ in any literal sense. He is one of those who Jesus said ‘go home and tell them’. Maybe Jesus is challenging him to stand up and take responsibility for himself. He couldn’t rely on being able, as it were, to hide behind Jesus.

Also the imperative ‘tell how much God has done for you’ is a reminder that unless we tell people about the difference our faith makes we aren’t going to challenge and change the mindset in our community that God doesn’t exist, faith and church is irrelevant, and we make our own hope and rely only on ourselves.

It may not have been easy for him, especially in view of what happened to the pigs. Jesus made the man whole again through healing, but he also sought to bring wholeness to the community.

In today’s world, there are many who are damaged and excluded, and there are many divisions of all sorts. These passages remind us that unity and not division are God’s desire and the impact of an encounter with Jesus may be the first step on the way to wholeness. It is up to his followers to proclaim this and to play their part in bringing healing and unity.

The passage in Luke 8.26-39 mentions fear several times. Jesus dramatically heals a man in torment. But the people who saw the man’s transformation and others in the locality were frightened, and asked Jesus to leave. Fear is a strong emotion and can prompt avoidance. We can miss the presence and peace of Jesus.

This week [tens of thousands of protesters rallied across the US for stricter gun laws following the tragic Uvalde school shooting](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-61772039). A Senator group said families were scared for the safety of their children and communities. People responded to fear by positive, collaborative action: they chose to actively campaign which will hopefully lead to tougher gun legislation.

The most common command in the Bible is ‘Do not fear’. Surely appropriate fear may help protect someone in dangerous circumstances. But most fears are excessive or unfounded, resulting from perceived danger or even from a situation feeling out of our control. Imagine a frightened young child who thinks they are lost; Mum or Dad passionately wants to comfort them. And our Father God does not want us afraid. We can pray for healing from anxiety and fear, right in the moment we are aware of it.

Is there anything in the news that is particularly worrying you at the moment? Do examinations cause you anxiety? It can help to talk to your family or church group, and to share any anxieties together. Pray for each other. Fear can hold us back from being people of peace, love and joy. Jesus desires peace for us and we can pray for our healing from fear, but also for the situation that is related to it.

At the 9 Beats meeting on Wednesday we were exploring how Western culture is based on the pursuit of happiness. But does trying to be happy all the time make us happy? Many difficult things happen in life. Hearing someone tell us to ‘cheer up’ rarely helps. Our discomfort with pain can make it challenging to be present to others in their pain. One of the reasons this man was rejected and isolated outside the town was that people didn’t know how to cope with him.

We can easily go into problem solving mode or share well meaning platitudes that end up making the other person feel even more alone. We are invited to witness to other’s pain without trying to fix it – to ‘mourn with those who mourn’.

We may be uncomfortable with others peoples sorrow because their pain implicates us or highlights the privileges we have in unequal systems. Those of us from ruling or majority groups often benefit directly or indirectly from the mistreatment of others. Instead of mourning with them, we may react defensively, denying minimizing or blaming them for their pain. If you find yourself having a strong critical reaction to someone’s expression of lament, it is worth exploring where that arises from. The inability to mourn is a term coined by German psychologist Margrette Mitsherlich to explain this phenomenon. which she observed among Germans who were complicit in Nazi atrocities.

Jesus calls us to healing and wholeness, unity not division, compassion not fear. Go and tell of what god has done through Christ.

**Prayers of intercession**

God of comfort,

in the week that marks five years since the tragedy of Grenfell Tower, we pray for those who are still grieving. As the nation is reminded of the disaster and remembers the night the tower burnt down we are aware that those caught up in the fire live with the memory every day. Help the survivors to find ways to work through their trauma, find justice and experience a measure of your deep and healing peace.

God of comfort,
**hear our prayer.**

God of compassion,

thank you for the sunshine this week. Thank you for the joy sunny days bring to lots of people. But as the sun shines and we enjoy the heat we are reminded of the many places in the world struggling to cope with the impact of climate change and rising temperatures. We think in particular of the brutal heat wave currently happening in India and the impact this is having on lives and livelihoods. As officials meet this week in Germany to talk about and prepare for the next UN climate conference, help the rich and powerful nations to see the damage wrought in the poorer countries of the world facing the most severe consequences of climate change. May those with power and influence listen seriously to their concerns and act swiftly.

God of compassion,
**hear our prayer.**

God of justice,

we read this week that the UN’s emergency food budgets are going to be drastically cut. The impact on places like South Sudan will be extremely serious. As difficult decisions are made around aid we pray for a spirit of justice; that everyone in need is seen and attended to.  Even in our own country, we are aware that reliance on foodbanks is growing even as donations are reducing due to the complexities of the cost-of-living crisis faced by so many. Thank you for the work churches across our land are doing to relieve hunger. Help us, as your people, to be agents of justice for those at the margins of our society.

God of justice,
**hear our prayer.**

God of wholeness,

today’s Gospel reading is an amazing vision of a healed mind. With mental health issues on the rise following the pandemic we pray for those suffering. We think of people we know personally who are struggling with their mental health. In the next minute or so pray for any friends or family members you are concerned about. (*Pause for minute for silent prayer*.) We pray for healing and wholeness, for the right interventions and for the professionals working with people with mental illness.

God of wholeness,
**hear our prayer.**

God of transformation,

thank you that the healing of the man in the Gospel reading also brought about his complete transformation. Thank you that he leaves his encounter with Jesus ‘proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.’ As we encounter Jesus may we experience transformation. Help us to be open to your love, comfort, compassion and justice, and find wholeness in you.

God of transformation,
**hear our prayer.**

**A sending out prayer**

Come with us, Lord, in our brokenness and bring healing.
Come with us, Lord, into our divided world and unite us.
Come with us, Lord, and cast from us that which is not of you,
that we may live as your children in your world,
today and always. **Amen.**

1. <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2022/119-may-june-2022-c/proper-7/bible-notes> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)