**St. David’s Episcopal Church**

### Bean Blossom, Indiana

### June 19, 2022 Pentecost 2C

### Sermon by The Rev. Kate Wilson

### 1 Kings 19:1-15a Psalms 42 and 43 Galatians 3:23-29 Luke 8:26-39

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### God bless you on this Father’s Day and celebration of Juneteenth! You might be surprised to learn that Father’s Day has only been a nationally recognized holiday since 1972. I was surprised because I know we celebrated the day years and years earlier than 1972. My dad had received tons of ties and socks and handkerchiefs before the day was official. Nonetheless, it was men who put the kibosh on the holiday, delaying its acceptance. Mother’s Day had been established and flowers and other gentle celebrations resulted. Men didn’t want such fluff directed at them. Until, after a Presidential Order by Lyndon Johnson and an Act signed by Richard Nixon, we have this day where men are unsurprised by their gifts and may have to do their own cooking at their backyard grills. I have a friend who has four different kinds of grill in his yard. This is a go-to day for him.

### Juneteenth is a State holiday in Texas, but not a national holiday. It celebrates the emancipation of enslaved people, celebrated on June 19. The name is sort of a contraction of June 19th, becoming Juneteenth. Two and one half years after Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, word finally got to the thousands of enslaved people farming cotton in huge plantation farms surrounding Galveston, Texas. The owners knew full well that their enslaved people had been freed. They just forgot to mention it until Army messengers came to Galveston to enforce it.

### Despite the usual injustice of the delay, Juneteenth has been a joyful celebration first in Galveston and Houston and, over time, throughout the nation. It is an occasion for family reunions and food is essential, with barbeque key. I remember driving through the South Side of Chicago on the Chicago Skyway and smelling the tempting smells of grills wafting onto the highway. I thought for sure that if I crashed a reunion and claimed to be a cousin they would welcome me as if they believed me. But I never had the guts to try that out.

### And so we see that cooking on the barbecue grill is the common factor to these important days.

### Perhaps it is not a coincidence that in today’s Gospel reading, Jesus banishes legions of devils into spare ribs on the hoof, and we have not only this important link to special events of today, but also the very first recorded account of mass soo-ee! cide!

### Forgive me, dear lord! Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa! For Luke’s account of Jesus’s journey to the side opposite Galilee has important issues to consider, and a few things left uncomfortably unresolved.

### First, Jesus crossed into Gentile lands as he shared his good news and new way of living. He often interacted with non-Jews, from the first time on the arrival of the three wise men from the East, to his journeys to the cities of the Decapolis, to his miraculous feeding of the four thousand, and again in this story, as he approaches the land of the Gerasenes. No city or nation name is used, so the precise place is not clear to us, but it's general location and the central role of a herd of pigs are clear messages that this is not Jewish land.

### What happens? I don’t know what Jesus’s agenda was, but a filthy, naked, raving man, hair a jumble, bound in broken chains, shouts at the top of his lungs, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me."

### How on earth would this poor soul know Jesus’s name? Why on earth would he fear Jesus might torment him? On this latter question, he had likely experienced much abuse, many scary chases back to the tombs, yet another chaining. But Jesus was a foreigner, a Jew. So the demoniac did not fear Jesus, the demons within him, spiritual beings, would immediately recognize Jesus as the son of God and a clear threat. Bystanders would hear them beg that Jesus not return them to the abyss.

### Perhaps to further the storyline clearly, Luke’s Jesus asks the voice to name itself, and it replies *Legion*. Not one demon, but thousands and thousands of demons. Abiding in one tormented man. Jesus will not torment the legion of demons, but will free the man from his torment.

### Jesus commands Legion into a herd of pigs. In ancient middle eastern demonology, evil spirits, devils, could not survive in water. Just like the Wicked Witch of the West. The terrified herd rushes down the steep bank and drowns in the Sea.

### What a dramatic scene! Hundreds of swine dead. A swineherd who has lost control of the owner’s fortune in swine. An owner ruined.

### This does not appear to be an ideal circumstance to begin a mission or to make warm friends with the people who depend on that herd.

### Would Jesus take the same action for one poor soul if given a do-over? I don’t know. Jesus learned from the Syro-Phoenician woman, revised his thinking and offered her a place of grace. Perhaps here he might reconsider, saying “Saving desperate man: good. Encouraging him to share his story: good. Using a herd of swine as a demon receptacle: find a better way.

### This Gospel is rather a mixed bag, isn’t it? It’s good news, showing Jesus's care for a troubled and excluded soul. Jesus crossed a sea, put his agenda aside, embraced a man who was unclean of body, soul, and mind, and was a stark naked Gentile. I believe we are safe with Jesus just as we are. That is the goodness. Hold onto that

### Jesus wouldn’t allow the man to join him, however. He had another plan in mind. He wanted the man, fully restored, to take on the mission of sharing his experience of being embraced by Jesus’s compassion and power. Does anyone make a better case for change and faith than someone who has come into it all backwards? Who is a more believable apostle of persistence and faith: Franklin Graham or a woman I met who had had a massive stroke. Maisy taught herself to tie her shoes with one hand because she knew God would help her. I met her in one of only two aphasia treatment centers in all of North America. I, too, had had a stroke just two months before my final seminary year. I was sure my call to the priesthood had died.. I was heart broken. Out of the blue, Maisy approached me. [Warning, Holy Spirit moment!] She pointed at me and said “mizziter”, then, when she realized my confusion, “You. Mizziter. Yes.”

### She shared the good news in one word. Mizziter.

### You. Minister. Yes.

### Yes. Sometimes, loving our neighbors is accomplished in one word. Sometimes, like the healed Gerasene, it is enough to be present, and, as St Francis said, to use words only if necessary.

### We have no idea how or when we might be encouraging to our neighbors. When we might share a light of hope in our culture of Doom and Gloom.

### Staying alert for those moments can change an afternoon, a day, or a life. If not that of another person, being alert of the grace all around us and ready to give it away will change us. Encouragement will become natural. Forgiveness or care will precede us. Prove me wrong.

Jesus's love and acceptance and grace fired up the possessed Gerasene Gentile. It fired Maisy to a life of hope and strength that she gave aware freely, as easily as breathing.

This Lucan Gospel says that we can do the same, with Jesus's endless love and full inclusion in the Body of Christ.

Thanks be to God.