

Votum:

Sisters and brothers, this is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Invitation to Confession:

We love because God first loved us. It is this truth and certainty that allows us to confess before God those places in our lives that are broken, sinful, in need of healing, and maybe even correcting. The cross reminds us that God responds to our honest pleas with kindness not retribution, caring not vengefulness, healing not a cold shoulder. Knowing this let us pray together the prayer of confession listed in our bulletins

preceding it with a time of silent preparation. Let us pray.

Declaration of Pardon:

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. Therefore, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Living Christ, I joyfully declare to you that our sins are forgiven. Sisters and brothers, believe this good news and live in its peace now and forevermore. Amen.

Summary of the Law:

Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first

and great commandment and the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

Amen.

Benediction:

Sisters and brothers, go in peace and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you and all those whom you love from this time forth and forevermore. Amen.

Sermon (6/19/16, Luke 8: 26-39):

It has happened far too often. This morning, like too many Sunday mornings, I find myself once again crawling into the pulpit feeling the weight of a week that has been drowned in tears and sadness. A brutal and horrific incident has again interrupted our focus and thinking - this time in

Orlando, Florida. We had hoped the last incident would be the last, as naïve as that might have been. We were just beginning to think we're okay but then it was all brought to a screeching halt by the sound of a high caliber rifle silencing the friendly chatter in a night club. In seconds, the mood shifted from joy to fear. People scattered - running

for their lives, hiding in bathrooms, scrambling under cars, tending to the wounds of others.

When the final tally was announced 49 were dead and 53 wounded. The shock is still fresh. The desperation of wondering how we should respond, what we should think, what we should do still burdens our thoughts and our

souls.

We can't help but to also think of the heroes – the first Responders who entered the scene, shocked to find a massacre more massive than they had ever expected. I will surely be praying for them as I know you will be too.

It's happened enough times now that we're acutely aware there is no safe

place - a movie theater, schools, shopping centers, on airplanes, at airports prior to even reaching the screening area, even in churches.

The process immediately following these things has a common thread – the feverish push to name.

To name the assailant. Who was he?  
What did he look like?

To name the event. An act of terrorism? A lone wolf on the prowl? An act by someone who was mentally and/or emotionally unstable?

To name the trigger. The internet? An outside terrorist group? A job related incident? A relationship gone bad?

To name the victims – to move them

quickly from a number to real people  
with names and faces and loves and gifts  
and dreams just like the rest of us; just  
like those whom we love and care about.

To name the enemy-it's what we do.  
It's how we order things. Nothing  
seems to unite us more than the  
emotional fever which comes as the  
result of an 'us-over-against-them'

mentality.

It is sad this tends to be the best we have to promote unity among us. It is also dangerous as, in our rush to name the enemy, we often become blinded to the complexities of what is behind these horrors. Most often the enemy is legion – too many to narrow down to even a few names. Life is complicated.

Human beings are complicated.

Religions are complicated. Even

Christianity is complicated. Despite the

urgency to name and blame, we must

remember the complicated.

What is your name? Is the first thing

Jesus asks as he steps out of the boat to

encounter a man who was not in his

right mind, as the text explains.

It's been quite the trip for Jesus and his disciples. First there was this crazy storm that blew up while they were in their tiny boat crossing the lake. The disciples thought for sure they were going to die but then, miraculously, Jesus calmed the wind and the rain.

Then, before they're even out of the boat, this crazy man comes rushing

towards them. This guy was in really bad shape. The community was scared to death of him. He was a threat to their well-being. He was violent and unpredictable. He had lost everything to these evil demons which had taken control of him right down to his clothes or, should I say, lack thereof! He was the evil other. The community had even

tried shackling him but somehow those demons gave him the strength to break free. Finally, the community banished him to a graveyard under the watchful eye of an armed guard.

You know what's interesting about this story? Okay, there are a lot of interesting things, but among them is the fact that it seems Jesus had deliberately

set sail for this place with his disciples in tow. Many think this was Gentile (Non-Jewish) territory Jesus had gone to. For Jesus and his disciples it was the place of outsiders and then, when they arrived, they encountered one who was even more outside than the outsiders! Even so, Jesus risked much. He didn't instruct his disciples to get back in the

boat and row for their lives. Instead, Jesus walked straight into the danger while everyone else was running in the opposite direction.

‘What is your name?’ Jesus asked.

‘Legion’ the poor guy answered.

Legion-there were so many things that had torn this poor man’s life apart; so many things that had made him an

outcast; so many things that had stripped him of his clothing and dignity.

It is the way of the demons that haunt us in the night – worries and stresses coming at us from every direction.

Vocational worries, financial worries, relationship worries, parent worries, children worries, health worries.

Oh to have only a single demon!

How much easier life would be! How much easier it would be to isolate it and bury it in some distant, out of the way graveyard!

What were the demons possessing the person who destroyed so many lives in Orlando, or in Charleston, or in Sandy Hook? What are the demons taking the lives of our young people every day in

the streets of our cities? What are the demons that have reached even the homes of suburbia sticking needles into the arms of those we have tried so hard to protect? What are the demons that are causing our homeless shelters to overflow? What are the demons wreaking such havoc in the streets of Syria that we can barely watch the news

on television anymore?

Jesus didn't run in the other direction.

Jesus didn't pull his foot back into the

boat and hightail it out of there. Jesus

didn't lead the charge to wall off the

graveyard so that this threat might be

contained.

As Jesus stepped out of the boat this

crazy man came running and Jesus

stepped towards him. Then, most shockingly, we hear the demons in this man conversing with Jesus with a kind of respect far greater than Jesus had found in his encounters with the Roman occupiers, the Church officials, and so many others. The demons clearly understood who Jesus was. Unlike so many humans, they recognized the

authority Jesus had over them. In the end, they obeyed Jesus setting this poor, long tormented, banished and isolated man free so that he could be reunited with the community he once belonged to.

‘Return to your home,’ Jesus told the now healed man, ‘and declare how much God has done for you.’

In other words, at least as I understand Jesus' words, do what Jesus did...step towards the demons as Jesus did when he got out of that boat. Run towards the nightmares we face so that we can deal head on with both our complicity in these nightmares and our potential to be part of the solution. Nothing has ever been gained and

nothing has ever been solved by isolating and trying to purify the demons from society. They are legion. History has shown again and again that such narrow minded attempts only cause the demons to multiply.

No, as hard as it sometimes is to do, as frightening as it sometimes feels, as strong as our impulse might be to do

otherwise, stepping out of the safety of our little boats into demon saturated messes armed with little more than the authority of Jesus is what we, as disciples, have been called to do. For too long we have relegated faith to little more than a self-help technique to make ourselves feel better. It is so much more than that and it demands so much more

from us including the courage to believe that, by the authority of Jesus, loving our neighbor, supporting ministries of compassion, reaching out to the ostracized, demanding that the preciousness of life be paramount in all we do will send the demons running. When they see this kind of stuff, they recognize right away from whom it's

coming and they know they have met their match.

In some ways, as believers in the authority of Christ, we are already doing this. We significantly support a local counseling group at a time when resources for treating mental illness runs far too thin. We provide support to local homeless shelters. (It's important to

note that the vast majority of the homeless population suffers from not being in their 'right mind' or, to use a more current term, untreated mental illness.) We have literally raised thousands of dollars so that numerous young people in our congregation could participate in mission trips where they learned how to step towards the mess

rather than away from it. Such experiences have changed their lives as much as it changed the lives of those they ministered to. We have struggled hard to be a place where, when the score card is finally tallied, love and tolerance takes precedence over drawing lines in the sand and excluding the other.

It has not been easy and sometimes

we have not done it well. None the less,  
every time we write a check and put it in  
an offering plate, every time we say  
'yes' by showing up here on Sunday  
mornings and agreeing to do our part,  
every time we place our hands on one of  
our own ordaining them to an office in  
the church, every time we risk stepping  
into the mess...the demons shutter

because they know, all too well, in  
whose authority we come.

To God alone be all the glory!

Amen.