

For as long as I can remember, I have always been afraid of *something*. And yes, I know, everyone is afraid of something, but this is like, from the time I can remember amongst the myriad of run of the mill fears—spiders, snakes, etc.,--my brain has always honed in on one at any given time. When I was itty bitty, it was thunderstorms. I hated them, would get nervous anytime the weather got sketchy. My parents got me a stuffed puppy dog whom I lovingly named Thunder that I snuggled when the radar turned green, who made a guest appearance at a children's chat long ago. But eventually I fell in love with storms and now I look forward to them.

From storms, it was someone breaking into our house. I blame this on being a millennial growing up in the *Home Alone* era, and that is the reason why I still get a tick of anxiety whenever I hear *Carol of the Bells*. This gave rise to my routine of checking the doors before I go to bed at my mom's, which was also the topic of a sermon a while ago. So ya know at least all of these things come in handy. That paired nicely with not liking to be away from home. Hated sleepovers, hated church camp, not a fan.

I went through a weird phase with bridges, not really afraid, but definitely not a fan, and then my family *walked* the Mackinac Bridge on Labor Day and I realized it wasn't really a thing anymore, if it ever really was deep down. I was such a big *not a fan* of throat cultures when I was

younger, I convinced my pediatrician to not make me do them when I was sick. Part and parcel of why I am *still* afraid of the level of sore throat I had when I had mono my senior year of high school that I never, ever want to experience again. And of course, all of these lovely patterns of things that I've been afraid of has morphed into the one you all know, me and flying. Not my jam. I'll do it if I have to, but I'm certainly not going to be happy about it.

I've come to realize that some of this is familial. We've all got our things and always have, some rational, some not so much. Sebastian is *deep* in his no thunderstorms for me phase and I've talked to him about Thunder and the things he can try to do to help ease it. Believe it or not, I have been the one to walk my sisters through flying the last times they've each had to do it. Each of us has used our own experiences with whatever it is that gets into our brains and doesn't let go to help each other, so there is a certain benefit to having such a wide range of experience with fear, but it's also just not the most comfortable emotion to dwell in or have so much of, and yet we all have it about *something*.

For each of us, there is that thing or things that just sit there, in the back of our minds and then when they appear, they move to our chests and plunk down like a weight. It triggers our flight or fight response and makes

us want to freeze and not move so the thing we want to avoid doesn't happen. When fear gets a hold of us, it does not want to let go and we don't always make our best decisions when caught in its grip. Something the community in our gospel lesson knows a little bit about today.

Jesus is well out of his normal territory this morning as we hop back into Luke's gospel after a very long detour through the Easter season. Luke tells us that this area of the Gerasenes is opposite of Galilee, but that makes it seem like it's just across the lake. It's not. Jesus is very far afield this morning, southwest of Lake Galilee, kind of out in the middle of nowhere. This is not a Jewish area, but a predominantly Greek area and so Jesus and the disciples are *very* out of their element, and if I were the disciples, I would be coming into my scared of being away from home phase. I would have been the one whispering to my next door disciple, "Do you think we should be here?" "Do you know where we are?" and you best believe that once we hit the edge of those tombstones and saw the main character of our story, I would have been ready to turn tail and get out of dodge.

What follows is something straight out of Stephen King novel. We have tombstones on the outskirts of town, which is creepy enough on its own and then out from the shadows emerges a figure. A figure who has torn clothing and chains broken around his feet, and suddenly he is yelling at

Jesus, and not just yelling at Jesus but seems to know more about Jesus than most people. “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” And again, at this point, my spidey senses are triggering the flight response, right? Like who is this creepy, cemetery living person who is calling Jesus the Son of God? This is *long* before any declarations of Jesus as the Messiah so this is really weird all the way around. And Jesus is just, well, Jesus. He tries to command the demons, but they don’t listen, and then...Jesus asks this guy his name! The disciples at this point have to be like what is he *doing*? And the answer is just chill-inducing. “Legion,” because there are so many...ick...

The rest of the gospel is just a sequence of the strange getting stranger. The demons start negotiating with Jesus and he actually *listens*. He gives them what they want. They don’t want to go back where they came from and so, yes, the poor pigs. Y’all I don’t want to dwell on the pigs and the swineherds and their livelihood, but the poor pigs. So then we have a large herd of swine drown themselves in the lake and Legion is suddenly calm, centered, back to himself, and everyone starts freaking out.

The rest of the community makes their way to the outskirts of town and what they see is entirely unexpected. Here is the man that they have kept chained up—whether for his safety or their own is a big question—and

suddenly, he's talking sensibly, he's in his right mind, everything is different, and again, there are dozens of pigs gone, and there's Jesus... All of the different versions of what happened start circulating, more and more people sharing the story and immediately, people want Jesus gone. They want him out of their town because...they're afraid.

It raises all sorts of questions of just what exactly they're afraid of. Are they afraid because what Jesus did was really weird? Are they afraid that now this man is going to come back into their community? Are they afraid for their own livestock? Or...are they afraid because Jesus has revealed himself as the one who comes into our lives and breaks our chains, frees us from the things which have kept us locked away from community and opens us back up to be our truest selves?

And this is where this very odd gospel of tombs, pigs, and Legion crosses into our lives in ways we might not have even expected. I think all of us if asked the question if we love Jesus wouldn't exactly have a hard time answering that question. Of course we love Jesus, of course we want Jesus as a steadfast presence in our lives, however...sometimes we don't always want Jesus in our lives as *Jesus*. We want comfy, cozy finding lost sheep and turning water into wine Jesus, we don't always want breaker of

chains Jesus. And it's not necessarily that we're afraid of *him*, but we're afraid of what that truly means for us.

What does it look like for us if we let Jesus come in and break the chains that keep us tied down? And I know some of us are going to be like, chains? What chains? But, if we're honest, we all have them. We might not be at Jacob Marley level of chains, but we've all got something. Past trauma that keeps a tight grip on our hearts and minds, prejudices and biases that we just won't let go of, hopelessness that tells us that the world is in deep despair and there is nothing we can do to change it, a general sense of ennui that life is just life and what's the point, an addiction to wealth, getting ahead, and making sure that we're taken care of more than others that borders on idolatry, a just take care of me and mine mentality that shuts us off from our community, from our neighbors. The list could go on and on of the things which wrap around our hearts and chain us up, and it is frightening to ask ourselves what it would look like to let Jesus come in and break those chains.

Because the reality is if Jesus breaks our chains, he is freeing us up not really for ourselves, but for others. Once he was healed, this man wanted nothing more than to go with Jesus, but Jesus says no, you have to stay here, in this community that you have an...interesting relationship with

and tell them about me. Jesus frees him, yes for his own health, but also for his community. If we are unchained, from our own pasts, our self-reverence, our hopelessness, our judgments, our doubt, our addictions to the world, then suddenly we are freed up to be amongst God's people, suddenly our focus isn't solely on ourselves, but on our neighbors, their needs and how we can help them be freed from their chains. Jesus frees us so that we can go out and help others be freed, and some days, well, we're just not interested in that, no matter how much we know that we need it, for our own sakes and for the sake of others.

You have to wonder if this man would have wanted Jesus to free him if he knew that it meant he was going to be called to be one of the first evangelists. It begs the question for us, do we want Jesus to set us free, to break the chains, and open us up to new ways of serving in this world? Do we want to have our eyes opened to what our neighbor needs? For each of us the answer to that question is probably going to depend on the day we are asked, but at the end of the day, our chains, they don't just harm us, hinder us, they harm our neighbor, the good we can do for the world. We have to be willing to let those things go so that we can go out into God's world. It's true, we need Jesus the good shepherd, Jesus the Savior, Jesus the teacher, but more often than not, we need Jesus...breaker of chains. **AMEN!!!**