

“The Tormented”

As the Threshold Moment stated: The scripture story describes a man whose demons forced him to live on the outside of community. The story is not only an ancient tale. **So many, struggle with demons that hold our spirits captive.** The stigma of this torment keeps us separated, holding life at arm’s length. Transformation and healing are possible but they may need to start with the work of compassion and truth-telling. **How can we stay in conversation, not running and hiding from the reality and pain of mental illness in our communities and be the healing salve of Jesus’ presence?**

We don’t usually think about ourselves or someone else as being “Tormented”. Partly, that is the case because we are encouraged by society to avoid the subject. When we discuss it, the topic is usually narrowed to be about someone else’s mental illness. **Yet, the truth is, everyone experiences being “Tormented” from time to time. Take a moment to recall the last time you felt “Tormented”.**

I remember times when I have been “Tormented”. One of the more recent ones was in conjunction with the major renovations Margaret and I have endured in our house during the past two months. It went on for weeks beyond the original schedule. **It seemed like we would never be able to resume our regular activities – that our schedules and lives were no longer under our control.**

Our “torments”, however, were only temporary and relatively short termed. Unfortunately, there are many people whose “torments” impact their lives much more profoundly either in seriousness or length of time or both. **All one has to do is watch news stories about the people who are suffering because of the actions of the weather or someone else, such as government officials.** Many persons have been or will be “tormented” by Hurricane Dorian. Since this congregation was founded by German Immigrants more than 118 years ago, our heritage’s story makes us more sensitive to the suffering and hardships many immigrants are forced to endure in the present. For example, there are immigrants, who are in this country legally and who have been allowed to remain because they qualified for a federal government program for seriously ill people, who are only able to receive the treatment they need in this country. **Unfortunately, many of them, especially children, have been informed by a US government letter that they have 33 days to leave the United States before they will become subject to deportation proceedings and that there is no appeal to that decision.** Let’s put ourselves in the positions of the parents of such children with cancer and other serious illnesses. Many of those children with life threatening diseases will die prematurely, if they are forced to stop the medical treatments they have been receiving. **How would you respond? Would you, your family, and your very sick child feel “Tormented”? Is it just or right that those persons must endure such torment and suffering?**

Brett Blair reminded us about Martin Luther’s “torment” when he wrote, “He was often, he felt, pursued and tormented by Satan and his cohorts. Until one day, while reading Paul’s letter to the Romans, he suddenly understood the meaning of God’s grace and how it is appropriated by faith.”

Blair concluded, **“You might say that after this experience Luther was no longer possessed by his demons, he was sitting upright, dressed, and in his right mind.”** (Brett Blair, www.Sermons.com.)

David E. Leininger asked, “Does the story of the Gerasene demoniac speak to OUR day as it did its own? Absolutely!” he answered. Leininger continued:

**“To the church which battles the demons of social evil, the message is there is hope in Jesus.
To individuals for whom there is an everyday battle ongoing with the demon of depression, the message is there is hope in Jesus.**

To those who battle the demon of fear, the message is there is hope in Jesus.

Those who fight the demon of addiction, the message is there is hope in Jesus.

And to those who have so many battles going on against so many demons that their name is

LEGION, the message is there is hope in Jesus.” David E. Leininger, Collected Sermons, www.Sermons.com

We find a good description of a “Tormented” individual when we look specifically at verses 28-29, *“When he saw Jesus, he gave a loud cry, threw himself down at his feet, and shouted, ‘Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? I beg you, don’t punish me!’ He said this because Jesus had ordered the evil spirit to go out of him. Many times it had seized him, and even though he was kept a prisoner, his hands and feet tied with chains, he would break the chains and be driven by the demon out into the desert.”* Even today, “Tormented” persons, who are prisoners of evil powers, recognize the Goodness of God and are afraid they will be punished – rejected, ridiculed, judged, embarrassed, and oppressed by the “Inside” people – religious types. Unfortunately, such negative expectations are proven right by legalistic Christians and society in general. Yet, there are some of us – members of the Body of Christ, who follow Jesus’ example and calling. **It is vitally important that we, the members and friends of Round Grove United Church, UCC demonstrate with our words and our actions that we are a “God Is Still Speaking” Community of Believers, where everyone – yes, all people, are really welcome here.** We need to live the message that God revealed by sending Jesus, the Son of God, into the world. Jesus came to heal the “Tormented” man and All who are “Tormented”! **His Life, Public Ministry, Death, and Resurrection proved God’s Agape Love is so great that our Divine Parent has Forgiven, Agape Loved, Invited, and Welcomes Everyone into the New Relationship with God and All People!**

When the “Tormented” man sought to reject Jesus – to get him to leave him alone, he was doing what many “Tormented” people are doing in the present. He and they want to avoid God and God’s Agents – that’s you and me (pause) for fear of being rejected and attacked. But Jesus, who is our Example, did not get discouraged and leave him alone. **Likewise, we are called to roll with such initial rejection by the “Tormented” and to be an agape loving presence available to comfort, fight for, invite, and welcome into Christ’s Community of Love and Acceptance.**

Our agape loving presence is still needed by someone, who is “Tormented” when they are healed – transformed into the New Being in Jesus Christ. They will find an angry society wants to punish them for upsetting the way things used to be, as were the pig farmers and their community toward Jesus and the healed man.

Instead of running away with Jesus to greener pastures, those, who have been tormented need to go back home to demonstrate their Transformation both for their own benefit and for their community, especially for the rest of those, who are the “Tormented”. Jesus inferred that as described in verses 38-39, *“The man from whom the demons had gone out begged Jesus, ‘Let me go with you.’ But Jesus sent him away, saying, ‘Go back home and tell what God has done for you.’ The man went through the town, telling what Jesus had done for him.”* SE)

Jesus went on to minister elsewhere but before he returned to the Divine Parent, he promised his followers that he is always with us. Friends, you and I and all members of the Body of Christ, the Church, help embody Jesus’ presence in the present! As persons, who have been “Tormented”, often find needed help in a 12 step program and receive comfort and support from their community in the program, such as AA, so each of us is called to be Christ’s Agape Loving Presence with those, who are “Tormented”. **Through our fulfilling our calling to Agape Love, Invite, and Welcome even the “Tormented”, we give them the encouragement and support, which can make a great difference in their lives.** By our lovingly Inviting and Welcoming, we especially give them and ourselves the opportunity to grow in the New Relationship with God and All People. **Find Comfort, Agape Love, Invitation, and Welcome in this Community of Believers and share it with others, especially the “Tormented”.** Amen.