

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Your eyes anxiously scan the horizon and you notice a small dot bobbing on the surface of the lake. Minutes pass by and the dot gets larger as a fishing vessel comes into view.

You watch its progress as it steers its way to your shore of the lake. A group of men helps ground the boat along the shoreline.

You peer out from your hiding place trying to decide what to do. They disembark and there is one man among them that you must see. You recklessly careen out from among the tombs and run as fast as you can to meet this man named Jesus.

Your hair disheveled, your body bare, covered with grime and bruises, the broken shackles trailing from your ankles, and with a wild, desperate look in your eyes, you fling yourself at Jesus' feet and shout at the top of your voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" How did you end up here, in this state, appearing like this? What went wrong?

For everyone who finds him or herself here, there is a story. None of us are just cruising through life one minute and then find ourselves at our wit's end and as disturbed as this man the next minute. We all have a story that leads us to this brink of despair. We all have a past.

For this particular man, we don't know what his past, his story is. He apparently did have a life and a home before whatever happened that led him to this state. We don't know if it was a sudden change that sent him over the edge, something with which he just couldn't cope or if it was something that slowly over time drained his life away and made him lose sight of who he really was.

The only thing we know for sure is that the crazed man who approaches Jesus from the tombs is not well.

He is not whole. He is not how God intends for him to be. The question for you today is:

Have you lived this story? Can you find your own past within this storyline? Do you relive your own despair, your longing for hope and relief through this wretched character emerging from the tombs? Your loved one dies, the hoped for job falls through, your relationship splinters, the cancer returns and you are crushed. Doubt and despair seeps in. You question the goodness of God.

Or maybe you just feel lost or adrift in life. One bad or mediocre choice leads to another which leads to another and it's as if you wake up 5, 10, 20 years down the road and wonder where you are and what's happened to your life. Who is that person smiling at you from those old pictures of yourself? What happened to your dreams and plans? Where did they all go? How far away have you fallen? How have you lived among the tombs? What has had such a presence in your life that it could be called legion? What part of you lives in such fear or hopelessness that it is as good as dead?

We come with our demons, whatever they may be, and throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus. It's not a bad place to be. Not bad at all. And Jesus speaks to us. He speaks to our hopelessness, our injury, our fears and asks us to name them. Why? For one, we need to know what they are. But there's more to it than that. There is something truly powerful about naming our faults & our woes, naming whatever binds us in the presence of our Lord. Call it confession. Call it being honest & authentic with God. But when we speak these things to Jesus, we tell them to the only one who has the authority to loose our bonds and to set us free.

Christ alone can forgive, heal and strengthen us, and remind us of who we are as beloved children of God, so that all these things no longer have the power to bind us. Christ alone sets us free. No longer do we have to be stripped bare by our shame or guilt or despair or fears from our past.

Instead we are clothed with Christ. Christ wraps himself around us like a garment. He shields us from harm. He enfolds us in his love his grace, his goodness. The shackles are removed from our wrists and ankles. The skin rubbed raw is allowed to heal. Jesus commands the tormenters within us to leave and they are forced to return to the chaos from whence they came.

So, it's as simple as that. You throw yourself at the feet of Jesus. You name your struggles and Jesus vanquishes the evil from your life. And you're done. In some cases, maybe it does work as automatic as this. For most of us, though, I think this is a pattern / a process that we continually live. Why else on Sunday after Sunday do we begin our worship with Confession and Forgiveness, naming how we have turned from God and given ourselves into the power of sin? And why else then with the prayers, do we offer ourselves and our petitions at the feet of Jesus with Jesus, in turn, giving us his peace as those who have been clothed in him and given the mind of Christ.

We live this story out week after week as the people of God. As we worship, we gather as a community and sit at the feet of Jesus, learning from him, loving him, giving him our attention and devotion. And then he sends us out. Jesus tells us, just like this man in the story, to return to our homes, to our daily lives, and declare to everyone how much God has done for us.

We share with the world how God has taken what is dead in us, what has lived among the tombs and brought it back to life.

For those of you who at the present find yourselves living among the tombs, this kind of reviving, this coming back to life can take time. Disheveled and matted hair must be gently and patiently combed out. Wounds must be cleaned and balm applied for the healing to begin. And naming the legion that has made its home within you can be difficult, pain-staking work.

But there is no better place for you & me to be than at the feet of Jesus.
For in time, you will be able to sit there clothed in his grace
and in your right mind. And my guess is that he will let you sit there
as long as necessary, to soak up his love and find the healing
that you need. And when the time does come when Jesus tells you
to return to your home and share what God has done for you,
your heart will be so filled with thankfulness at that point
that there won't be anything you'd rather do
than to go and share such very good news.

Jesus is in our past. He is the one who holds our future.
And in this present moment, Jesus is all that we need.
Draw near to our Lord who continues to bring you back to life.