

“Cast Away Your Bonds”

I imagine some of you have seen the movie “Cast Away” with Tom Hanks. It is the story of a man who survives a plane crash and learns to live alone on a deserted island. The two layers of the story are how will he survive and will he ever be rescued. Running through those two layers are the love for his longtime girlfriend and fiancée Kelly. That love inspires him to continue to strive after survival and rescue. While Tom Hanks’ character is stranded on the island all we know of is his struggles. We have no idea of what is happening back home. His yearning to return home is so profound that when he gets back to find his fiancée has married another man and, as they like to say, “gotten on with her life” he is devastated. We know that Kelly has always hoped for him to return, but her hope fell afoul of practicality.

What happens to the characters in “Cast Away” is similar to what happens to the people in the Gerasene town. The town has been tormented by a man who has a Legion of demons. They have been unable to help him and his disease has only become worse. He prowls the tombs naked as he lives among the dead. To the townspeople he is a “dead man walking.” They have no hope and so they leave him to himself and pray he does not bother them.

When Jesus arrives on the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee he and the disciples encounter this man before any others. He throws himself at Jesus’ feet and says, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.” Of course, it is the demons speaking not the man. They are afraid that Jesus will banish them from the man back into the Abyss. Instead he sends the Legion of demons into a nearby herd of swine. The swine are so tormented they throw themselves off of a cliff into the sea.

You might think that the people of the village would be celebrating the newfound health of their friend and neighbor. A man who has lived naked among the dead is now back among the living. However, the livelihood of the town was threatened when the swine hurled themselves into the sea (there was no prohibition against eating port among Gentiles).

Jesus’ curing of the demoniac also upsets what is normal. The people of the town have gotten used to dealing with the man. His insanity was the status quo. Now that he is in his right mind they are not sure how to deal with him. Humans are adaptable, but we also like things to be regular and average. Large changes upset our equilibrium. Moreover, the townspeople are worried about what other sorts of “cures” Jesus will bring to them. Rather than waiting to find out they ask Jesus to leave. Like Chuck and Kelly in the movie who cannot stay together because it upsets her new equilibrium.

As Jesus is departing, the man formally possessed by demons asks to join Jesus in his ministry. Jesus turns him down. He wants the man to stay as a daily reminder of the power of God to transform people. Rather than being a disciple he will be apostle who shares the Good News of Jesus with his people.



There is a cost to freedom and a cost to the cure. These Gentiles are not able to see who is standing before them in the person of Jesus. They are blinded by the loss of the swine. They are confused by the sudden healing of the demoniac.

Perhaps it is like the Chuck and Kelly in “Cast Away” who had not reckoned on the cost of having their prayers and dreams fulfilled. The townspeople may have hoped for the man’s healing, but they did anticipate that there would be a cost for his healing. What’s more they are unable to see the value in the possessed man’s restored life; all they can comprehend at that moment is their losses.

When we invite Jesus into our lives we may think that we are in for a greeting card kind of Jesus. We sing “What a friend we have in Jesus” or “I come to the garden alone” as if Jesus is a sort of pal or BFF who asks nothing of us, but gives unfathomable amounts of care and love. We are often looking for a Jesus who does not challenge us or our satisfactions with ourselves or our lives.

That is not the Jesus of the New Testament. Jesus came into the life of the world full of compassion, love, and the power of healing. Those qualities of Jesus’ are transformative. They do not allow us or our demons to sit still. When Jesus cures our ills we do not just get up and go on our way as if nothing happened. We are changed as surely as the demoniac was changed.

This change is part of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called *The Cost of Discipleship*.¹ Discipleship is not easy and most of us fail at it. But we also know that when we are in communion with God there is nothing better, even with the cost in front of our faces. The sublime moments when we feel the deep love of God fill our hearts and souls are worth the cost.

The Christian life is not an easy life but neither is it misery. The joy deep in our souls gives us strength for the journey. As St. Paul wrote, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”² That unity of people and purpose in Jesus is nigh unto heaven itself.

Let us strive to live lives of peace and love for one another even the demoniac or the one who costs us dearly in earthly things. It is only the things that are of God that last and truly matter in our lives. It is only the Community of Love and the drawing in of others into that beloved community that matters. Discipleship has its cost, but its rewards make wealth, power and privilege pale in comparison. Cast them away into the abyss and be freed for peace that is the love of God.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* [Greenwich: Touchstone, 1995]

² Galatians 3:36-38 NRSV