

Our second reading tonight about the man whose life is being ruined by the demons that are in some way controlling him, doesn't make for very easy or comfortable listening.

That is because we hear of a man whose life is being completely taken over and being held by those things which are controlling his life. Furthermore, these demons as are identified in the reading were also harming his life as well. In Mark's version of the same story the man was we are told "bruising himself with stones" (Mark 5:1-20) and also in Mark's version we are told further "no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain." and most sadly, he was so totally controlled that though the demons recognized Jesus as "Son of the Most High God," the man himself could not free himself of them.

Now it's said that all the "demons", all of the things which control people's lives that Jesus confronts have three things in common: firstly that they in some way cause an element of self-destructive behaviour in the person suffering from them, secondly the person who is controlled by them feels trapped in that condition, and finally these controlling influences in some way separate the person affected by them from living normally in society or their family circle.

Now this passage can be quite a challenging one to reflect upon, let alone to preach about, but I never shy away from these difficult tasks, that is because I would suggest a way of understanding this passage in our lives today afresh, is to discern through it what we might and those around us might be or are being, in some way controlled by in our lives.

So one way then of reflecting upon the passage is by defining afresh what are described as "demons" in the reading, and those things could then be defined as things which prevent us from becoming what God intends us to be, things which might be holding us back in our relationship with God, things which might be controlling us and affecting our lives.

Now in our society today these things can be numerous but they might not be just external things that hold us back in our lives, many of us might also have things holding onto us internally such as guilt, or sadness, or depression. I share with you this evening that I've known a friend of mine for many years who on the surface I'd always thought of as being a happy go lucky sort of guy, but over time it became clear that behind this façade of happiness he was living with major doubts about himself. On the outside things looked fine but behind the smile all sorts of thoughts and feelings were holding him and to an extent controlling his life.

Now if we think about the story we've heard this evening from Luke's gospel about Jesus and the man who is called by the demons holding him as Legion, in a more metaphorically divine light, it might then illuminate to us what we might ourselves learn from it today.

Because I would suggest that those who confine the story to a limited interpretation, as some do, as being just about an individual's battle with mental illness, limits I would suggest the meaning of it to us all in our lives.

That is because what I'm suggesting this evening is that we can interpret this encounter between Jesus and the man much wider, which in turn has implications for us today, in that it opens up for us an opportunity of discerning and seeing what might be holding us back in our lives, holding us back in our relationships with each other and also holding us back in our relationship with God.

Now one possible thought which I've read recently how we might think about the reading from Luke puts it very simply; in that it shows to us that when all seems difficult and dark in our lives then Jesus is there to meet us at our greatest need.

This thought is reinforced by the stories of Jesus' healing people in their lives that come immediately before and immediately after our reading tonight.

In the previous chapter of Luke, in chapter 7 we hear of a woman who bursts in on the supper as Simon the Pharisee is hosting Jesus, she kneels weeping before Jesus and washes his feet with her tears -- all despite the objections of Simon the host. Jesus' healing words to her were, "Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (7:48-50).

And the story immediately following today's reading from Luke contrasts the double healing of the twelve-year-old girl and the woman suffering twelve years from haemorrhage's -- a dead, innocent little girl and a ritually unclean woman. The girl can do nothing for her resuscitation; the woman takes the initiative herself and touches Jesus' robes. The girl has a grieving family; the woman is alone. The girl can't act out of faith; the woman reaches out from faith. Almost opposite circumstances, yet Jesus meets them both in their greatest need and brings to both new life. Just as he brings new life to the man in our reading.

This new life is of course also what God brings as he breathes into the nostrils of the man in our first reading from the book Genesis. Without God's breathe there would be no life in the man.

There is no getting away from the fact that to discern the reality of the things that might be holding each one of us

back in our lives can be not only uncomfortable but also even painful, but we are also assured that in those revelatory moments, the divine presence of God will meet us.