

Sermon Notes for the Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7 C) June 20 2010

Independence Day is coming soon.

Though we usually call it the Fourth of July.

And rather than being a celebration of our national independence from the British;

It is a general patriotic celebration.

But personal independence remains the American dream.

No dependence, but independence is our hope.

One of the themes of our day seems to be a desire for something like autonomy.

Literally, to be a law unto ourselves.

You know the books about bowling alone and the breakdown of community in America.

We resist being herded together into groups.

We like things tailored to our individual expectations.

Give me my own car, my own ipod, my own phone, total control over my space and time.

This is consumer autonomy.

And, frankly, this wish for total autonomy fosters what is worst in our political life.

Quickly, hear me say that is true on the left and on the right.

Many liberals and many conservatives agree on this:

The most important thing is that I be left alone, to make my choices,

With no greater power guiding me towards the good that I might not choose on my own.

That terrible isolation, that infantile libertarianism may destroy us yet.

Those who follow Jesus, those baptized into him, have a different life as their birthright.

See it in the man made whole among the Gerasenes.

First, Jesus was not a libertarian.

Minding his own business was not his primary value.

This trip across the Sea of Galilee was into Gentile territory was no accident.

He had to set his sights on that unclean shore.

And there waiting for him was the man suffering from an unclean spirit.

[Here is a question to bracket

Was it mental illness?

Were demons more real then or more common?

It does not matter; this man was subject to a power than was not good for him,

A power that was not of God.]

The narrator tells us that he was a man of the city. That means something.

Let us picture his birthright.

He was meant to live in the city; have a family or live on his own.  
Likely to make a living with his hands, worship his gods, make decisions with others in  
his little community.  
He was to be himself, whole but in community with others,  
Independence in community;  
His fate tied to theirs.

Whatever the cause of his condition, he was a man who was utterly lost.

He had none of the above.  
His very name, that symbol of personal wholeness was gone.  
His voice, that basic means of asserting one's personhood, was replaced.  
Replaced by the voice of the demons who spoke through him.  
"Legion" or "Mob" he called himself.  
He literally was not himself.

And he was utterly alone.

When in the city, his neighbors kept him in chains, for great was their fear.  
But usually, his illness/possession meant that he lived among the tombs.  
His neighbors were dead people.  
They do not make much of a community.  
In city or wilderness, he was utterly alone.

Shall I go so far as to say that this is still a picture of too many modern western persons?

Likely not true of you church people; joiners who desire community with others.  
But for so many, the transient American masses, moving from exurb to exurb  
Alone wherever s/he is;  
Deprived of life-giving relationships; determined to be autonomous and alone.  
Emotionally detached from even close family members;  
Certainly not connected to neighbors or fellow citizen.  
And we may even end up there sometimes ourselves.

So Jesus then gave this man his life back.

He healed him, sent the demons out. Comically into a herd of Gentile pigs.  
The man immediately came back to himself; found his voice, recovered him.  
He could speak and be spoken to;  
He could call out to others and be called out to.  
He was a person again; independent but in community.

The man then wanted to go with Jesus.

He rightly sensed that many would look on him with continued fear or suspicion.  
Perhaps he wanted to share in the life-giving ministry of Jesus.

But Jesus did not let him; he sent him back to his native city, with a charge.  
“Go home and tell everybody just how much God has done for you.”  
So this man is to be a disciple, sharing the good news of God in Christ.  
He is whole; he is in community; and he has someone in authority over him.  
The Lord Jesus commands him; he obeys.  
Obeys in the joyful work of living as a servant of Jesus.

Christians do enjoy a blessed freedom; a wondrous liberty.  
But our freedom is not autonomy.  
You are not a law to yourself.  
We are not our masters.  
Ours is not a purposeless freedom from, but a purposeful freedom to.  
Through his death and resurrection, Jesus set us free from the power of sin and death.

And it is he who is our master; he who guides, directs, and governs us by his Spirit and his Word.

Here in the church that is his body, you have a chance to truly be yourself.  
A child of God, a blessed individual.  
But an individual in deep community with others.  
You are not your own.  
All under the awesome and gentle authority of a Lord who gave himself for his servants.