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CALL TO WORSHIP

We meet in the presence of God
who knows our needs,
hears our cries,
feels our pain,
and heals our wounds.

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ.

Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:
let us sing to God with thankful hearts.

Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN To God be the Glory (StF 94)

To God be the glory, great things he has done !
 So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
 who yielded his life in atonement for sin,
 and opened the life-gate that all may go in :
Praise the Lord ! Praise the Lord !
Let the earth hear his voice !
Praise the Lord ! Praise the Lord !
Let the people rejoice !
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son ;
and give him the glory — great things he has done !

Title: 'To God be the Glory'
 By: Frances Jane van Alstyne, (Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915)
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PRAISE

God's saving power will rise like the sun
All: bringing healing like the sun's rays.

Declare God's glory among the nations,
All: his wonders among all peoples.

The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

All: We dwell in him and he in us.

Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his name,
All: make known his deeds among the peoples.

Sing to him, sing praises to him,
All: and speak of all his marvellous works.

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God almighty,
All: who was and is and is to come.

CONFESSION

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all.
 Let us come to him, in sorrow for our sins, seeking healing and salvation.

All: Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.



O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
 to every believer the promise of God !
 And every offender who truly believes,
 that moment from Jesus a pardon receives :
Praise the Lord ! Praise the Lord !

Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,
 and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son ;
 but purer, and higher, and greater will be
 our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see :
Praise the Lord ! Praise the Lord !

**We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen**

May the God of love and power forgive you and free you from your sins,
heal and strengthen you by his Spirit, and raise you to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen**

PRAYER

Great God, you are one God, and you bring together what is scattered and mend what is broken.
Unite us with the scattered peoples of the earth that we may be one family of your children.
Bind up all our wounds and heal us in spirit,
that we may be renewed as disciples of Jesus Christ, our Master and Saviour. **Amen**

SONG I am a New Creation (*StF 553*)

I am a new creation,
no more in condemnation,
here in the grace of God I stand.
My heart is over-flowing,
my love just keeps on growing,
here in the grace of God I stand.

*And I will praise you, Lord,
yes, I will praise you, Lord,
and I will sing of all that you have done.
A joy that knows no limit,
a lightness in my spirit —
here in the grace of God I stand*

Title: 'I am a New Creation'

By Dave Bilborough (b. 1965)

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BIBLE READING Luke 8 v26-39

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me'— for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

REFLECTION

As usual, what happened is reasonably easy to work out from this encounter between Jesus and a man clearly suffering from severe mental illness, not unreasonably described as demon possession. The man saw Jesus coming and went to meet him. After an exchange that gave some idea of his affliction he was healed and, in the process, a large herd of pigs was destroyed. Ultimately the man was persuaded to be reintegrated into his community while Jesus moved on.

So far, so straightforward.

But that's just what happened. If we ask 'what's that all about, then?' we need several aspects of context as our tool for interpretation. We need to select the four aspects of context that are geographical, socio-religious, historical and political.

Geographically this takes place somewhere on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee among the Decapolis – the Ten Towns. There is some uncertainty about exactly which of the towns was nearest which is reflected in varying translations. The key point is that it was not Jewish territory. Some social-religious context shows us that: the locals were keeping pigs; Jews wouldn't be doing that.

Another piece of the socio-religious context is that to a Jew the whole setting is filled with uncleanness. Pigs and those who kept them were unclean according to Jewish Law. The dead and graveyards were also unclean and contact with them would in turn make a person unclean.

It is intriguing but unproductive to ask why Jesus went there in the first place. We can never reach an answer to that. It is possible to speculate with hindsight that Jesus knew in advance what would occur and he wanted to demonstrate that his mission was to include the outcast, the unclean and Gentiles. Alternatively, he may simply have needed a break, put out to sea and that was where the wind took them. Ultimately, such speculation is unproductive. I shall simply put it down, along with a growing list of such questions, as something I shall ask someone when I get to heaven!

Historically, it is always worth reminding ourselves that any event recorded in the New Testament took place in the 1st century AD and events in the gospels are around the end of the third decade or beginning of the fourth. Politically, that means the whole area is under Roman domination. The Roman army was everywhere keeping an uneasy peace. People would be allowed to live if they did as they were told and kept on the right side of the occupying forces. Local collaborating politicians would do ok; tax collectors and prostitutes might do well. The Roman Legions were The Enemy. Many Jews dreamt of a Saviour - Messiah - who would drive the Romans into the Mediterranean Sea.

Which brings us to the sea as another part of the socio-religious context. Jews saw the sea as the source of chaos. It was, therefore, the best place for what caused chaos and disintegration.

Already a parallel between the bigger picture of the wider historical-political context and the detail of one individual begins to emerge.

Perhaps this individual has become obsessed to the point of possession by all things Roman. Especially all things violently and negatively Roman. It is not unknown for superhuman strength and hysterical behaviour to go with such obsessive illnesses. Finding a psychological parallel doesn't necessarily remove any possibility of forces outside our power or understanding which might get a grip on people's minds, especially under such stressful and dangerous historical-political circumstances. It looks as though the man who came out from the tombs to meet Jesus was so obsessed by the alien forces around him that had taken over his country that he had become possessed by an internal legion of invaders who had taken over his personality and crushed his humanity. It left him naked, isolated, violent and self-destructive.

So, at a very simple level the answer is clear. What this is all about is that what happens for the individual stands for what is wanted for the nation of Israel. The Kingdom of God is Jesus' favourite subject and what he came to establish, so what he did also indicates aspects of the Kingdom. God's Kingdom means healing and the restoration of justice so the unclean and oppressive must be banished into the sea.

But this happens on the other side of Galilee in Gentile territory. Luke is pointing out to his mostly Gentile readers that what was centred on Jewish hopes for the nation of Israel is not just about the Jews. What Jesus is about is for all: Jew and Gentile, Slave and Free, Sick as well as healthy, disturbed as well as those at peace, the marginalised and overlooked as well respected and respectable.

The man's legion of demons seems to stand for the Roman Legions.

But it's not quite as simple as that.

We've seen a bigger picture than this individual and his obsessive-possessive disorder. But there is more than a 1st century political point going on here. Surely there is something spiritual going on as well.

What we may have noticed but haven't pointed out yet is the parallel between this individual's situation, cure and rehabilitation and what we know about Jesus and the climax of Jesus' story.

Jesus ends up tortured, naked, isolated and dying among the tombs. He takes on all that the world has dealt to this individual. That is how healing takes place in God's eternal, spiritual scheme of things through Jesus.

If we dig that little bit deeper for the other parallels, this story tells us of the spiritual battle as well as the personal and the political battles. In our interpretation of the Bible, it is important not to find we can't see the wood for the trees. Don't miss that bigger, eternal perspective.

But conversely, we must also take in the detail of the trees. The big story is told through an incident involving an individual. It has a clear focus on detail that needs to be carried into the detail of our own lives twenty centuries later. Jesus met a man with deep human need, afflicted by the chaos of being possessed by an internal version of external forces that had become his obsession. Jesus met his need and healed that distress.

One of the points that this story is all about in terms of Jesus on health is that wherever humans are in pain and distress Jesus' mercy, healing, comfort and compassion need to be expressed and applied. Jesus' big story is that he identified with those in pain and distress, possessed by powers outside their control or understanding. On the cross he took the full evil force of The Enemy and let the others go free. For Jesus' people today, the interpretation is plain: Jesus calls us

to bring his message of mercy, healing, comfort and compassion to every community because it is in every community that people are in pain and distress.

Again, the parallel is there in the man from the tombs. He wanted to go with Jesus, stay with Jesus, know what he felt to be the safety and security of being close to Jesus all the time. But Jesus wouldn't let him. In that sense we have an advantage in being part of the church and having received the gift of the Holy Spirit so that Jesus' promise that he would be with us always to the very end of the age can be fulfilled along with the charge he gave to the man from the tombs. 'Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.'

This man's new life depended on Jesus in a different way; perhaps he found that the Spirit gave him strength and inspiration among his family and friends in his home and community. What is clear is that before Paul coined the phrase or claimed the title this man was an apostle to the Gentiles. All those of us who have known Jesus' healing and restoration and know him to embody the Kingdom of God have the same charge.

He said it to Legion, he said it to apostles and disciples, he's said it to me and he says it to you: 'go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.' **Amen**

SONG Beauty for Brokenness (StF 693)

Beauty for brokenness,
hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world
this is our prayer.
Bread for the children,
justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset,
your kingdom increase !
Shelter for fragile lives,
cures for their ills,
work for all people,
trade for their skills ;
land for the dispossessed,
rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause
of those who can't speak.

*God of the poor,
friend of the weak,
give us compassion we pray :
melt our cold hearts,
let tears fall like rain ;
come, change our love
from a spark to a flame.*

Refuge from cruel wars,
havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary,
freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields,
scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness,
his cross for the pain.

Rest for the ravaged earth,
oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned —
our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness,
carelessness, greed ;
make us content with
the things that we need.

Refrain

Lighten our darkness,
breathe on this flame
until your justice burns
brightly again ;
until the nations
learn of your ways,
seek your salvation
and bring you their praise.

Refrain

Title: 'Beauty for Brokenness'

By: Graham Kendrick

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PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Loving God: our sanctuary and our hope,
we lift before you a world in need.

For all those living in the midst of conflict, we pray for peace, comfort and hope.

We give thanks for the courage of the people taking to the streets in protest, for those who have opened up their hearts and homes to refugees, and for the peace-making efforts we see in action all around. May we seek to be peacemakers in all we do, no matter how small our actions may seem.

**All: Holy Spirit, move us
Holy Spirit, strengthen us
Holy Spirit, open our hearts**

We lift before you all our siblings in Christ living in poverty.

We think of those facing the worst effects of climate change, at the mercy of extreme weather and food shortages.

We bring before you those who find themselves choosing between heating the house and cooking a hot meal.

We give you thanks for the courage of lobbyists and campaigners; may their voices be heard and taken seriously.

We give thanks for the generosity of volunteers and aid workers; may their work inspire others to do the same.

**All: Holy Spirit, move us
Holy Spirit, strengthen us
Holy Spirit, open our hearts**

We think of those known to us, struggling with illness, bereavement, loneliness, fear or anxiety. In a moment of silence, we bring before you the people and situations on our hearts at this time.

- time of silent prayer -

Lord, we know that you hear us when we pray.

We ask for the courage to be your hands, feet and voice in this world. May we be bearers of your light, sharing your hope and everlasting love with the world.

All: **Holy Spirit, move us
 Holy Spirit, strengthen us
 Holy Spirit, open our hearts**

In Jesus' name, we pray **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

All: **Our Father in heaven
 Hallowed be your name
 Your kingdom come
 Your will be done
 On earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread,
 Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
 Save us from the time of trial
 And deliver us from evil.
 For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen**

HYMN Jesus – the Name High over All (*StF 357*)

Jesus — the name high over all,
in hell, or earth, or sky !
Angels revere, and nations fall,
and devils fear and fly.

Jesus — the name to sinners dear,
the name to sinners given !
It scatters all their guilty fear,
it turns their hell to heaven.

Jesus — the prisoner's fetters breaks,
and bruises Satan's head ;
power into strengthless souls it speaks,
and life into the dead.

O that the world might taste and see
the riches of his grace !
The arms of love that compass me
would all the earth embrace.

His only righteousness I show,
his saving grace proclaim ;
'tis all my business here below
to cry : 'Behold the Lamb !'
Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name ;
preach him to all, and cry in death :
'Behold, behold the Lamb !'

Title: 'Jesus – the Name High over All'

By Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage;
hold fast that which is good; render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak;
help the afflicted; honour everyone;
love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among us and remain with us and those we love and
all for whom we pray today and always. **Amen.**

All: We go into the world
 **to walk in God's light,
 to rejoice in God's love
 and to reflect God's glory.**

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