



**Sunday, 23rd June 2019 – 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Trinity**  
**Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey**  
**Readings: Isaiah 65: 1-9 & Gospel of St Luke 8: 26-39**  
**Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard**

### **Possessions**

If what we possess, possesses us, how then do we find freedom? Let's consider the man in the Gospel who has been enslaved by his demons for years. We cannot know what caused the poor man's psychotic state of mind. We ignore satanic influences at our peril, however, most in our modern society access his symptoms as perhaps deriving from a clinical condition or, as the result of abuse, whichever all are as real as demons. One thing is certain, in Gerasene culture, they believed in demons. To answer my question, freedom for the man came from believing in Jesus Christ.

### **Social outcast**

Although, the man has been a social horror to the Gerasene's they are far from thrilled at Jesus' presence. You might say well that's hardly surprising, their herd of pigs has nose-dived over the cliffs seemingly at Jesus's direction. Here, the Gospel account echoes the reading from Isaiah which states that people were worshipping in tombs, sacrificing pigs and eating their flesh, the things that were contrary to Jewish law. The pigs' demise may have been as the result of Jesus' intervention or just as equally, the raving man may have frightened them with his shrieks causing a stampede, which Jesus' uses as a graphic way of demonstrating to the man his demons have departed. We can't know, however, what is clear is that the Gerasene's' peaceful daily routine is disturbed by Jesus, whereas the man has found peace of mind in Jesus despite having no possessions at all.

### **Facing facts**

Jesus has the habit of forcing people to focus on what is preventing them from being more faithful in following him, as today's prayer says, 'in word and deed'. This is nothing new for the reading from Isaiah indicates that despite all God has done for his people the ancient Israelites pursued their own way of worshipping rather than acknowledging God's way. It is heart-rending to hear God's plea: "I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am', to a nation that did not call on my name. I held out my hands all day long."

### **Ignorance is no defence**

We ignore God at our peril, as the Israelites found out after being taken into captivity away from the Promised Land, the very land that God had provided for them. The

more we possess the less we likely to remember who has been the source of all that we have received. Taking things to the extreme, we can be so focused on our possessions, whatever they may be, that they enslave us to the exclusion of all else and that, in itself, becomes a mental and spiritual health condition. So, what's the antidote?

### **Less is more**

The greatest gift that God has given us is life itself. But how do we treasure life when we know that despite the miracles of modern medicine, at some stage, we will die? Between now and then, things wear out. Our eyesight is not as clear as it once was; our hearing loses its clarity; our legs tire more quickly than they once did and as for our memory – umm, what point was I just trying to make? The faculties that we once possessed go into a state of reverse and once more we can become as dependant as children. How then do we hold on to what gives us life in all its fullness that will stay with us when all else has gone? It's the possession that costs nothing, it's the freedom to pray knowing that God is "holding his hands out all day long" ready to grasp our heartfelt desire to talk to him, so that he may guide and support us in our daily living. To pray to God, as a natural instinct sets us free from our possessive anxieties or, as I read recently, 'Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God'\*.

### **Free to serve**

With freedom, however, comes responsibility. We may be the only one in our home, place of work or club that knows the peace that comes from God's love. When Jesus healed the possessed man, quite naturally the man wanted to join him and the disciples. Jesus, however, knew that in his healed state, for his countrymen, the man would be the best witness to the Kingdom of God. So, Jesus said to him, as he says to us too: 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.'

### **Prayerful summary**

To close, everything I have been trying to share is found in two prayers of St Augustine who, in his life knew, exactly the perils possessions present. The first prayer is very tongue in cheek, which he uttered as a care-free, rich young man laden with possessions: 'O God, make me good ... but not yet!'

The second, is a prayer Augustine wrote after founding an order of monks having given away all of his possessions in the realisation of where true possessions lie:

O thou,  
who art the light of the minds that know thee,  
the life of the souls that love thee,  
and the strength of the hearts that serve thee;  
help us so to know thee that we may truly love thee;  
so, to love thee that we may fully serve thee,  
whom to serve is perfect freedom;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reference** \*Corrie Ten Boom