

**STILL THE RAGE**  
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June 19, 2016  
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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**Luke 8:26-39**

*Once upon a time, a crazed and deranged man came roaring out of a graveyard and charged toward Jesus. Jesus stood his ground. The crazed man fell to his knees.*

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The world is not a safe place. It just isn't. Not even Disney World is safe. If one thing doesn't get you, something else will. The world is not a completely safe place. A lot of crazy stuff happens.

Storms rage and wreak death and destruction. Storms can't be stopped. But destruction can be mitigated and lives can be rebuilt with grace and grit and by human ingenuity and resilience.

We can rebuild but who can stop the rain?

Storms rage and crazed people rage, slaughtering innocent lives. We can't stop the rain but can we stop the rain of bullets?

One year ago this past week a crazed man slaughtered nine people in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC. Last Sunday a deranged man slaughtered 49 in a nightclub in Orlando. And who can forget Sandy Hook or Virginia Tech. The litany of gun violence goes on and on.

Who or what can still the rage? Can laws alone do it?

Martin Luther King, Jr. was often criticized for trying to change laws. Many white people liked to say at that time, *it was the human heart that needed changing not the laws*. King agreed with the heart part.

He knew there would be no peace on earth until the human heart was cleansed of hatred, fear and darkness, and filled with love, peace and light. But in the meantime, he said, he welcomed any law that would restrain the hand of wickedness and reduce human suffering.

Societies need good and sensible laws.

We need strong and sensible gun laws. *No society in its right mind allows its citizens to possess military assault weapons*. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, former commander of U.S. and international forces in Afghanistan, made such an argument in the New York Times this past Friday ("Home Should Not Be a War Zone").

*No society in its right mind allows its citizens to possess military assault weapons*. Military style weapons slaughter civilians yet they are still the rage. No need to put a fine point on it. It's just crazy.

And that brings us to the gospel lesson and the crazed man who was not, as the story puts it, *in his right mind*. It's a story about one crazed man, but he can easily stand for a people or society gone crazy.

Once upon a time Jesus stepped off a small boat and onto the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Instantly a crazed man charged out of the graveyard toward him. The deranged man was demon possessed.

*Leave me alone*, screeched the crazed man.

What is your name, asked Jesus in an effort to get to know the person in front of him.

*My name is legion*, snarled the man. *Legion!!!*

And that name stops us in our tracks for “legion” means “many” as though to say this man or that society was tormented by many demons. Not unlike our own nation.

But “legion” also means a battalion of Roman soldiers, or a thousand to be exact. The Roman Empire’s battalions had taken possession of that land and its people. The people were possessed, possessed by a violent force that crucified and slaughtered them as lambs.

At that time and in that place, the most pressing question for Jesus and his people wasn’t how to get to heaven. The most pressing question was how do we cast out the Roman demons that haunt and terrorize us.

The religious zealots had one answer: *arm yourselves. Kill or be killed.* Jesus had another. *Forgiveness, not revenge. Healing, not hurting.* In the wake of his non-violent resistance to evil, the cross would become a symbol of redemption, a symbol of violence and suffering transformed into mercy and reconciliation.

A crazed man bolted out of a graveyard toward Jesus. Jesus spoke a word and the demons fled. The once crazed man was now, as the story puts it, in his right mind. Healed and whole again.

But the story doesn’t end there. Those demons jumped into a nearby herd of pigs. Which raises at least one question: *What was that Jewish region doing raising pigs?! We’re about to find out.*

The pigs went crazy and flung themselves over a cliff and into the abyss. It was an instantaneous economic disaster for those who had made a lot of money selling pork chops to the Roman occupiers.

Yes, we should feel sorry for the pigs. And I’m sure the local People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) chapter had something to say about it. We feel sorry for the pigs.

But how much sorrow should we feel for those who lost profits from feeding the violent machine terrorizing the land? And what about those in our own nation who profit from feeding a violent machine? Will they surrender easily? Will they be happy when our society regains its right mind?

One man was healed, restored to his right mind and the local pork business was outraged and ordered Jesus out of their country. *GET OUT*, they yelled. *Leave us alone.*

As it turns out, they didn’t care about saving lives. They only cared about profits.

I don’t believe in demons. But I do believe in the demonic.

If we only see in this story the power of the historic Jesus, we miss the good news. This story is a revelation. Jesus is the revelation of a powerful healing presence in this dangerous world showing us that love is stronger than hate. We are not alone. Something greater than ourselves is among us.

Yes, the forces of darkness are powerful. But love is more so. We have within us a power to confront the demonic and restore persons and societies to their right minds.

It’s not magic. It’s love. And love is hard work. And sometimes love has to work really hard to find the right words and the right laws to protect people from hatred, violence and bigotry.

This story ends with the formerly crazed man asking to go with Jesus. But Jesus said, No. Which is to say: Stay here with your people. You don't need to follow me. There's work to be done right here.

On June 26<sup>th</sup>, one year ago, the Supreme Court of the USA ruled 5-4 that gay marriage is a constitutional right and all 50 states must immediately allow it. All existing bans were now legally invalid.

The ruling didn't change every mind or heart in this land. But it did speak a healing word and established it in law so that LGBT persons might have protection and dignity while hearts are slowly transformed.

Yes, the world is a dangerous place. Storms rage and wreak death and destruction. But violence cannot end violence. Hate cannot drive out hate. Rage cannot still the rage. Only the quiet power of healing love can. And that power is within waiting to be awakened.