**HOUSE OF HOPE PRESBYTERAIN CHURCH**

**St. Paul, MN**

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**TITLE:** The Wine is Found in the Cluster

**LECTIONARY TEXTS**: Isaiah 65:1-9; Luke 8:26-39

**BULLETIN COVER:** “There is no place in this whole world that is without the potential for unearthing holiness right where we are with the people we are with." - Eugene Peterson

Well, welcome everyone on this bright and cheery Sunday morning. I’m glad to see you all. I give thanks to be a part of this series of hope-filled sermons.I don’t usually say yes to invitations to preach. It is hard as an outside preacher to know the context of the congregation. But when Julia invited me, she said, “You are bridging many worlds and I hope you can join us to share the word from that *larger* perspective in our focus on hope.” I *do* come, professionally, from a larger, the ecumenical perspective, the perspective of *oikumene* which means looking at the whole, the whole world. But we *all* *live* in a larger perspective, so today is a time to consider that broader perspective and to consider God’s hope for us in that broadness.

So again welcome, welcome on this Father’s Day. Welcome to this day of Juneteenth celebration. Welcome to Pride month! The solstice is just a couple of days off. Now that COVID has at least lessened, we’ve got public graduations and weddings and showers and birthday parties, dance recitals, and band concerts, and vacation plans that we have not had for years now. It feels to me like a June is busting out all over with the holidays and celebrations! Just two weeks ago tomorrow that we celebrated Memorial Day and it’ll just be two weeks from tomorrow that we celebrate the Fourth of July.

But June is not just busting out in celebration. It is also an explosion of negative headlines. The Council on Foreign Relations, gives me a daily read out of the violent political hotspots. It is not a bright picture. Instability in Venezuela, attacks by Boko Harem in Nigeria, civil war in South Sudan, fighting between Turkey and Armed Kurdish troops, Israel-Palestinian conflict, conflict between India and Pakistan, territorial disputes in the South China Sea. And it has been 115 days since Russia invaded Ukraine with no end in sight.

We all are we’re still reliving the experiences around the killing of George Floyd, even as we anticipate the anniversary of the death of Philando Castille in a couple of weeks. Even as we remember that seven years ago last Friday, members of a Bible study group at Charleston's Emanuel AME Church were joined by an admitted white supremacist who, after prayers were said and the meeting was over, stood up and opened fire on the African American churchgoers, killing nine. And we’re still reeling, of course, from murder of our children in Uvalde, mass shootings in Tulsa, Buffalo, and a church in Alabama.

And the Congressional hearings aren’t helping. They require us to relive the attack on our capital and on democracy on January 6th. And we have to face the *possibility* that one of our presidents was intentionally spurring on the attack and was *withholding* protection from the Congress and the Vice-President.

Racism, violence, death of our children, insurrection, and new warnings about the ongoing developments of COVID variants. Today’s text about the guy with all these demons resonates with me - a culture of many demons. Well, what’s *this* got to do with celebration and hope?

**Celebration and hope in the face of pain and trauma can be the most vibrant and memorable and inspiring hope we will ever know.** We’ll come back to the question of celebrating hope in the midst of pain but first let’s take a look at today’s text.

Jesus sails across Lake Galilee. As he steps out on land, a man meets him who is not wearing any clothes, and lives where the tombs are. He has been kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and run off. *He* cries out, recognizing the Holy One, and Jesus asks him his name. He says “Legion” Lee-gee-own the same Greek word used to name the largest military unit of the Roman occupying forces – more than 5,000 infantry, three such legions occupying Palestine. Jesus was traversing an occupied territory when this man shows up.

Okay, I bet somebody is asking, “What about the pigs?” Pigs in Israel? Pork as not kosher but this part of Palestine was populated predominantly by Gentiles. If the man was a Jew he would have been in the minority. And the pigs were European pigs a recent archeological finding tells us. Perhaps first brought by the Philistine’s from Crete; certainly brought by the Greeks in their invasion and maintained by the Romans in their continued occupation of the land. Pigs were a symbol of the occupation of this land.

But back to the man for a moment. One biblical scholar describes his situation this way, “This is a case of disintegrated personality. All the symptoms described have the *note* of authenticity: the morbid preoccupation with graves, the abnormal strength, the insensitivity to pain, the refusal to wear clothes, and the multiple and fluctuating self. The man conceived of himself to be possessed by a whole regiment of demons; like the country he lived in, he was enemy-occupied territory, and it may well be that his condition arose out of the traumatic experience associated with the Roman occupation. (*Saint Luke*, G. B. Caird, p.121)

A Disintegrated Personality is a personality that is fragmented, inconsistent, unpredictable, unbalanced and made up of aspects that conflict each other. Let me reread that description and think about it as a description of our culture. “A culture that is ‘fragmented, inconsistent, unpredictable, unbalanced and made up of aspects that conflict each other.’”

We know that a disintegrated personality can occur as a trauma response. Anyone can develop a disintegrated personality, but those with trauma and complex post-traumatic stress disorder are at an increased risk.

I raise this because, this use of the word ‘legion’ as relating to the occupying forces is so often overlooked. As is the fact that the trauma of political occupation and political domination can contribute to a person’s - and a culture’s - mental health.

The legion of demons of *our* moment may well be traumatic enough to cause some of these symptoms in our culture. I would guess that everyone here has known someone who had COVID, had it themselves, dreamt of having it, felt fear and concern about the damage it could cause, felt pressed to protect yourself from it, had huge arguments about its reality, or had to re-make lots of plans because of the COVID threat. We are all victims and a traumatic cloud is going to lay over our lives for a while.

Now add to that general trauma, the particular trauma that some groups experience - trauma caused by political marginalization, colonial occupation, autocratic rule, repeated narratives of trauma.

A scene from TV: Three friends in Manhattan meet at a bar, two men and a woman, they had a great evening together. When it was over, they walked out, hugged and said good night. The two men turned one way and walked up the street. And the woman turned the other way and walked down the street - as the background music changed to a very solemn tone, with a certain impending aspect to it. Then the camera flipped back to the two men walking and their music was nonchalant, happy, light. The camera went back to the woman and the music filled with dread. For a woman, …walking alone at night can be an experience of trauma. “Am I going to be safe? What can I do to keep myself safe?” There may well be no actual threat anywhere present but it’s been enough of the narrative growing-up-female, that it presents itself.

There are traumas like a pandemic that get to all of us. Then there are *cultural* traumas that shape narrative and behavior and policies and practices that press down on particular groups of people. We are a community living under a legion of such demons. Sinful forces of *community habit* like systemic sexism and racism.

I remember the week after George Floyd was killed. I had a conversation with a good friend. He identifies as Black. I identify as white. I told him how, while in watching this TV show, I realized the ever-present trauma of walking alone at night as female.  There was a long pause and then he said, with a quiver in his voice, “It’s like that for me, Peg, every time I walk out the door and it stays that way until I walk back into my home again. Will I be safe? He said, “When *I* walk out of a bar with another black man, we are perceived as an increased threat to the white community, which, in turn, means *we* feel under increased threat.”

**We have a legion of demons in our lives which are traumatic and they are not due to foreign, occupying forces but they grow because we allow them to in our name.**

So where is the celebration in all this trauma? There is no easy, clear, formulaic answer for that. But today’s scriptures offer us some direction. **We must watch for, claim, and call out to the holy hope in our midst.** The man sees the Holy coming toward him and the sickness cries out not to be destroyed. Jesus, in turn, sees *the holy in the man* and the potential for healing. God sees the wine (the hopeful possibility) in the cluster, Jesus sees the possibility of healing in the man. Our job is to watch for that holy presence in our lives, to rely on it, to call on it, claim it to bring us to our own healing possibility.

But let us not take this story down some individualist healing road. Yes, Jesus sees the holy in each of us. Yes, Jesus offers healing to each of us. That is not to be dismissed. But we must also not miss that Jesus’ context was always the larger community. Jesus lives, moves and acts in community. His healings are never just about the individual but about the healing of the community as well.

And the healing of the community is lifted up in today’s Isaiah text, which is talking about the community at the national level. God seeing the wine in the cluster, is a story about the nation. God sees in the cluster the *better* nation, the nation that will live God’s will. So, God hopes to heal it to its better self.

How shall we live in God’s hope in these days? In the days of a legion of violent, polarizing, lying, vehement, bullying, warring, forces? How can we celebrate in such times? Some decades ago, the US was sending military personnel and weapons into Nicaragua to support the dictator Somoza in his fight against the Sandinista. Teams of volunteers went unofficially to observe what was happening. My friend Joyce was one. She was in a small village and one of the landmines that the contra had placed was set off by a three-year-old girl killing her. She was beloved by her family and it was a heart wrenching time for the village. And for Joyce as her realized that the US had supported the action that killed this girl. The funeral had happened, and the village had settled down a bit, and Saturday night came, and some of the villagers knocked on Joyce’s door and said, “We’re going to fiesta. You have to come.” And she said, “No, I really don’t feel like it.” The villagers looked at her and then looked at each other and one said, “You’re not planning to be here very long, are you?”

They knew that to live in the midst of political occupation and violence required that they find a time to intentionally celebrate and look for hope for the future. Pain requires the spiritual practices of hope and celebration in order to keep up our courage and determination strong. In order to face the demons of our days with any kind of steady, prolonged resistance, and healing, we must find the holy celebrations. The kind of celebration that calls on what we really, truly believe to be *real*, what we really truly believe to be *of ultimate value*, what we really, truly believe *God hopes for us*.

God sees in the cluster, the better nation, the peoples that will live into God’s hope, God’s will. Living into this hope, God says later in this Isaiah chapter. And these words are manna for those who live in trauma, if you are hurt by your past, by the culture around you, by the words, the jokes, the policies, the practices, hold on to God’s promise!

(Isaiah 65:17-25, redacted)

**17**For I am about to create new heavens
    and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
**18**But be glad and rejoice forever
    in what I am creating;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard,
    or the cry of distress.
**20**No more shall there be
    an infant that lives but a few days,
    or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;…
**21**They shall build houses that they themselves shall inhabit them, not another;
    they shall plant vineyards and they themselves shall eat their fruit, not another.
**25**The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
    the lion shall eat straw like the ox;…
They shall not hurt or destroy
    on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.

This is what God hopes for in us as a people, as a nation, as an oikumene, a whole earth. The transcendent hope that God’s will is going to be done on earth as it is in heaven and a healed community *will* live an abundant life. This is the hope that God’s will for right relationships - at every level - will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God sees the holy, redeemed future in God’s people. Let us be a people who share that vision, who watch for that holy hope.

Let us be a people who see the holy possibility in front of us.

Let us be a people who choose to trust the ever-present mystery of hope, of freedom, of redemption, of healing from such demons, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Isaiah 65:1-9**

**The Righteousness of God’s Judgment**

**65**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.
**2**I held out my hands all day long
    to a rebellious people,
who walk in a way that is not good,
    following their own devices;
**3**a people who provoke me
    to my face continually,
sacrificing in gardens
    and offering incense on bricks;
**4**who sit inside tombs,
    and spend the night in secret places;
who eat swine’s flesh,
    with broth of abominable things in their vessels;
**5**who say, “Keep to yourself,
    do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.”
These are a smoke in my nostrils,
    a fire that burns all day long.
**6**See, it is written before me:
    I will not keep silent, but I will repay;
I will indeed repay into their laps
**7**    their[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2065&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18905a)] iniquities and their[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2065&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18905b)] ancestors’ iniquities together,
says the Lord;
because they offered incense on the mountains
    and reviled me on the hills,
I will measure into their laps
    full payment for their actions.
**8**Thus says the Lord:
As the wine is found in the cluster,
    and they say, “Do not destroy it,
    for there is a blessing in it,”
so I will do for my servants’ sake,
    and not destroy them all.
**9**I will bring forth descendants[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2065&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18907c)] from Jacob,
    and from Judah inheritors[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2065&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18907d)] of my mountains;
my chosen shall inherit it.

### Luke 8:26-39

### Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac

**26**Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, [[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-25264d)] which is opposite Galilee. **27**As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-25265e)] no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. **28**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”— **29**for Jesus[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-25267f)] 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.) **30**Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. **31**They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

**32**Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-25270g)] begged Jesus[[h](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-25270h)] to let them enter these. So, he gave them permission. **33**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.

**34**When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. **35**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. **36**Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. **37**Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes[[I](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-25275i)] asked Jesus[[j](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-25275j)] to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So, he got into the boat and returned. **38**The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus[[k](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-25276k)] sent him away, saying, **39**“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.