

2022-06-19 ... 10am Worship Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

Isaiah 65: 1-9; Galatians 3: 23 – end; Luke 8: 26-39

Our names are very important to us. Someone chooses them for us, perhaps even before we are born, and yet somehow they come to define the person we are. If we are outstanding enough, it might even be used to define others who share our characteristics – the six year old we know who is ‘a proper little Einstein’.

When I thought about it, surprisingly often we want to change our name because its association doesn't work for us anymore. Then it's important that others adopt the new identity marker which we have chosen. Some of you will remember a member of our congregation called Edna who hated the way her name had been taken over by Dame Edna Everage and eventually announced that she would like to be known as Ena instead. My aunt known as Peggy through her childhood introduced herself as Margaret to the man who would become her husband and was known to everyone outside the family as Margaret thereafter. My niece who, with her new husband, invented a new surname for themselves, signing the legal documentation to support it almost immediately after they signed the marriage register.

The man who comes to meet Jesus on the Gerasene shore has lost his name, he even knows himself by the name that he has been called since the mental distress he suffers from has shown itself in his changed behaviour. He is known as Legion.

Released from his demons, in such a dramatic way and witnessed by others, so that he will never be able to doubt that the moment happened, he recovers his self control.

We don't find out his real name. I quite like to think that, commanded as he is to stay in his home city, to declare the good that God has done for him, he chose a new name for himself, to mark his new identity and to celebrate the journey he has been on. God after all renamed several of the important actors in our faith story – Abram and Sarai becoming Abraham and Sarah, and Saul becoming Paul.

Legion meets Jesus on the shore, straight off the boat. I think it is not unusual to first meet God when we're at an outermost limit – perhaps a physical edge like the beach or a hill-top, perhaps an emotional edge like the sadness of grief or the euphoria of a wedding. At these times and places we are more alert, able to think in the silence, perhaps aware of our loneliness or lone-ness. I wonder when and where you first found yourself able or needing to talk to Jesus? For me, it was a type of lone-ness as I was away from home in that safe no-man's land of university, learning to be an independent adult, facing the question for myself – did I believe or not. The question that began my conversation was born out of the fear of making a fool of myself.

As Luke tells the story, the man, Legion, approaches Jesus ...

Jesus, apparently immediately fully understanding what has control of Legion, commands the evil which has hold of him to leave. Legion responds by asking Jesus to leave him alone, to stop tormenting him.

It can be very difficult to give up the things which burden us. Legion allowed himself to be released.

I wonder what burdens you? Have you approached Jesus, have you talked to him about that burden, opened yourself up to the One who is willing at the very least to share the load?

I'd like to remind you of the image of God that we heard in Isaiah – God says: **'I was ready to be sought out', 'I said Here I am, Here I am', 'I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people'**.

God is waiting for us to turn to him. As Paul reminds us, what we are, is not of significance to God. God doesn't grade us according to our race, our gender, our social standing. God sees us, the person we are within. And God says of each of us, taking words from an earlier passage from Isaiah: **'You are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you.'**

Amen