

THE MADMAN AND THE PIGS- A Father's Day Sermon by Dan Stern, June, 2010

I Kings 19:9-12 and Luke 8:26-38 (Message)

Adding to that kind of creepy story, an additional meant-to-be creepy reading (see if you recognize it) from [William Shakespeare's Macbeth](#):

*"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of **sound and fury**,
Signifying nothing."*

William Faulkner's 1929 literary masterpiece *The Sound and The Fury* took its name from this Shakespearian passage. In German, it's called *Sturm und Drang*, storm and stress. Drivenness. Agitation. Like the hart, or mule deer of Psalm 42, "heated by the chase", hounded by the hunting dogs. Going pointlessly round and round, until one's dying day. Seemingly forever on a treadmill. A tale told by an idiot, a life signifying nothing. Sounds awful, doesn't it?

On what I hope will prove to be a happier note, today is Father's Day. But that father of all prophets, Elijah, when he was hiding out in that cave, is like all fathers at their lowest of low moments, when done in, exhausted, like all driven men in our society, at that point in life when it seems as if all we have been striving for and battling against have been for naught. Some have worked so long and so hard. Men have tried zealously, striven valiantly, faced into many a strong wind, powerful earthquake, raging hot fire. And then as if going off in a cave by ourselves somewhere, afraid and weak and feeling small, it comes to us that all our work and strife hardly amount to a hill of beans. All the righteous indignation too that kept us going, that motivated a manic

pace, a workday fury, & a tolerance for loud noises, explosions & much destruction- suddenly . . . it comes to a halt.

The New Testament story is even more chilling. I mean, can't you just see this *madman*, this victim of demons, naked and living not in a cave, but in a cemetery? Repeatedly being thrown into convulsions, placed under constant guard, tied up with chains and shackles- ones he kept breaking in two, ankles and wrists bleeding & bruised, brain crazed and body convulsing? Ah there but by the grace of God, might you and I go; am I right, my brothers? Have not many of us felt driven nearly stark-raving nuts with all the pressure around, within?

Thankfully in neither story does despair get the last word. Luke 8:35: "They came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had been sent, sitting at Jesus' feet, wearing clothes and making sense. It was a holy moment." I'd like to just stay there with that holy moment, let nothing else interfere. Befriend the calm that comes *after* the storm. Sound of sheer silence. . .(pause). Feels good yes? I do realize that some of you bleeding heart liberals out there may be feeling really, really sorry for all those poor suicidal pigs. But remember: it is a story after all, and it's quite possible that no pigs were harmed in the telling of it. And know this other thing too, something not always emphasized enough when this story gets told: those pigs were the property of the Roman occupiers, owned by soldiers and their superiors who had taken over the small farms and vineyards of the peasants. The people of Palestine didn't eat pork. Pigs were considered unclean. So naturally, they weren't a bit pleased that large herds of swine were increasingly rooting through their crops, taking over whole hillsides. . . why their very economic livelihood, not to mention the widespread environmental damage, not to mention their religion and way of life, all these were being endangered and blatantly insulted. In the Palestine of Jesus' day, 3,000 to 6,000 Roman soldier LEGIONS were stationed in each potentially-troublesome Roman-occupied region. Remember what the name the madman told Jesus was his name? Legion. That name had a double meaning, you see. The legion demons *within* corresponded with

the demonic forces at work in society- and literally, with the legions of Roman soldiers. The soldiers- and their fat free-range swine were THE most visible symbols of the oppressive circumstances the Palestinian peasants lived under. These legions of Roman soldiers literally wanted to have their pork and to eat it too. So when Jesus came along, and un-demonized the man and frees up the land at the expense of the pigs, it wasn't the resident peasants that complained (though they may have felt afraid about what would happen next); it was the Roman overlords who were none too pleased. Symbolically at least, it is the Roman oppressor swine getting their come-uppance at last! The changes are happening fast; so some are afraid. Yet at this moment, justice IS getting served.

And the man, formerly known to be stark raving mad, and in shackles and chains, is experiencing, maybe for the first time in his entire life, an un-tethered, in-one's-right-mind, utterly calm and absolutely holy time.

So: to my sometimes-driven nearly crazy brethren, I say, "Take heart". One demon-possessed man, not entirely unlike you or me, gets freed from bondage and things make sense and all is tranquil at last; it is a holy moment. And we can get there too.

The prophet Elijah went through madman - similar sturm und drang, storm and stress, drivenness, agitation. He's seen it all, my brothers: winds that split mountains in two, broke giant rocks into pieces, earthquakes that rattled to the very bones, tumbled buildings to their very skeletons, fires that flamed up and raged furiously hot. And God was not, God was not, God was not... in ... *any* of these. God is not in our manic workaholism. God is not in our unendingly idiotic wars. God is not in our long-buried emotions and periodic violent outbursts. God is not in the wind, earthquake, fire. Or at least, not in them *in and of themselves*. But... *maybe* in them *through the things that contrast with* them. When the very *opposite* of everything that came previously finally arrives. Hear the still, small voice of calm? Do

you recognize the sound of sheer silence yet? In THAT, finally, God IS.
(pause)

I don't know if one speak about sheer silence. Is it like describing the color of utter darkness? At the end of the day, both the sound of sheer silence and the color of utter darkness have to be experienced. The only way to know them, to know the good contained within them, the only way to befriend the darkness and the silence, is to experience them. SO- take your time. Little by little, give silence- call it prayer if you like- time to blossom and become full. Give darkness- call it rest for the spirit- a chance to become radiant with technicolor dreams. We get to the night via the day, after all. We get to the quietude via the noise. So in the morning light, where we gather as a church, we'll keep telling our ancient faith stories, we'll tell of that father of all prophets, Elijah, so very zealous, so furiously committed to always doing what he though was right, we'll hear tell of earthquakes, winds, and fires he endured- they will remind us of ones we've endured too- and we'll remember that God was not in midst of any of them. We'll hear tell of that equally-furious madman of the country of the Gerasenes, tied with chains and shackles, driven wild by his inner demons, and we'll think of the demons that oppress us too, and remember that Christ came to make our burden light and easy. Then every night, we'll lay down our burdens and forgive us our trespasses and keep those demon legion swine at bay, un-oppressed in utter darkness content to hear the sound contained in sheer silence.

(pause). AMEN.