

## Sermon 4<sup>th</sup> of Trinity 2016

Luke 8: 26-39

Both the old Testament reading and the Gospel, many of us know quite well, the lovely pictorial story of Elijah finding God in the sheer silence and the not so lovely imagery of the poor pigs leaping to their death, after taking on the many demons.

Many of us don't seem get much silence these days, silence quite often makes us uncomfortable and so we try to fill it. Sometimes silence makes us think too hard about things that we would sooner forget. Yet as Elijah found out it is often in the silence that we find God. Our liturgy in the church of England is lovely and well thought out, but there is never much room for silence, except when we put together a bespoke service. Matins is exceptionally wordy, and the purists in the prayer book society do not take kindly for any deviation from the rubric. Yet is that really what our faith is about keeping faithfully to rubrics that have been set in place back in history.

We of course can't deny the skill of those who have gone before and Cranmer's gifts of improving greatly what had gone before stands out, he brought grace, balance and a sense of the natural rhythm of the English language to what he found in the Primers before. Yet no change happens without controversy and it would have been so for Cranmer. We need always to be respectful of the way people find God in and out of worship, some undoubtable find God using the Prayer Book others Common Worship, Others through contemplative prayer and others like the Quakers through silence. Whichever way helps people reach God is the right way. It of course makes life colourful and quite difficult not being the same, but what a boring church we would be if there was no variety.

Jesus found lots of variety on his travels in his earthly mission, which was over a relatively small area, he didn't travel vastly, yet what a ministry, it spread to all four the corners of the earth.

Today in our Gospel Jesus met a group of people in the district of the Gerasenes, these people would have been non-Jews as they kept pigs and the fate of the pigs is always a bit distressing in this story but Jesus brought new life to this poor man who had many demons. After the man was cured he of course wanted to go with Jesus, who wouldn't. But Jesus said "no" go home

and tell the story of all that God did for you. So he went and proclaimed through the whole town all that Jesus had done for him.

We often believe that we don't have a mission field here in leafy West Sussex, or perhaps Hampshire, so difficult living on a border...

But seriously we really think that mission is something that Christians go abroad to do, but recently Africans for instance are coming to England as they see us here as a mission field. Many are losing touch with the teachings of Christ, and we in the Church shouldn't bury our heads in the ground over this.

Jesus asked the man whom he healed to stay in his town and tell the people what God has done for him. It takes guts to do that even Jesus had trouble convincing people of who he was in his home town. And we also find it difficult, yet we have been set here to be witnesses to the Christian faith.

And actually we have ample opportunity. We've got the art festival going on this weekend and we've made sure the church is welcoming, the plants are for people to purchase the flowers are for people to admire and the school has done an amazing stained glass effect window for us. All this shows that we are a living church, there for whoever needs us. We also had the Rural Fair two weeks ago when instead of asking people for money through a raffle we gave things away we had a comfortable sanctuary for people to sit and have a drink and activities for the children. We were a witness to the Christian faith, not by what we said but by what we did. And of course actions often speak louder than words.

We had a big funeral in Milland on Friday of a relatively young person and we were there not just to be a venue but to be Christ to those who grieve. If only one person after that funeral looks differently at the Church and the Christian faith, then what God asks of us is done. Because God did not just give the advice to stay in town and tell the people about God, to the man with the demons he asks it of us also. The challenge God brings to us is precisely the same "Go and tell the people you meet every day what I have done for you. Amen.