

*1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a, Galatians 3:23-29, Luke 8:26-39*

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Wendy and I are heading to our “happy place” on Monday. As we have for the last several years we will be packing up the car, loading our bikes on the rack and driving the 7 or so hours to Southport Island, Maine, outside Boothbay Harbor. We will be staying at Tom and Pat Evan’s quaint family cottage on the rocky coast. Since we have made this journey several times, we have already planned which favorite restaurants we want to be sure to patronize, and we are familiar with the pickleball court locations and hours of group play. We know the windjammers will be sailing into the harbor on Wednesday, and we are looking forward to fresh lobster, salt air and the peace and solitude of the deck chairs. While there is comfort in the familiarity of our pilgrimage, there is also a sense of wonder and anticipation of the uniqueness each day will bring. Will the eagles have returned to their nest? Will we see otters and osprey? Will there be baby alpacas at the farm? What new adventure will we embark on this year?

I hope that each of you have some plan in these coming weeks of summer that you are equally enthusiastic about. A favorite place to visit, or a family reunion, a day in the mountains with friends, or a week at the beach with loved ones. After this rather chilly and very wet spring, my wish for you is a time of rejuvenation and relaxation.

Journey is an interesting word. It can be defined as an act of traveling from one place to another, or it can describe a long process of personal development and change.

Today’s gospel describes the faith journey of a man who was most likely not Jewish. The way Luke’s gospel tells it, Jesus and his disciples arrived in a town on the other side of the lake. This man they encountered had been possessed by a multitude of demons and he had suffered greatly because of it. Jesus, commands the evil spirits to leave him and they do.

We cannot gather from the reading if this man knew of Jesus and his teachings prior to this event, but we do learn from this telling that he was so grateful to Jesus that he wants to follow him from that point on. But Jesus instructs him to return to his home and tell people his story. In a word, he should evangelize. He is to spread the good news of how his life was changed by Jesus.

Each one of us has a faith journey. Our story of how we came to be in this little yellow church on this Saturday afternoon/Sunday morning in Central New York. Exploring your faith journey can be an interesting experience. How did you come to the Christian faith? How did you come to the Episcopal church? What brought you to St. James’? And perhaps, most important, how has knowing Jesus changed your life?

Some of us were born in to families that practiced Christianity. We were baptized as infants and confirmed as teens. Some of us chose the Episcopal church as adults because we enjoyed the liturgy or found meaning in the eucharist. Some of us, like our friend in the Gospel have had our demons driven away by Jesus. Regardless of how or why you first came to St. James' I hope that you feel respected and loved by our congregation and I pray that you leave here filled with the Holy Spirit, reinvigorated and fortified to face whatever life sends your way.

In a few minutes Father Gary is going to invite you to partake in the eucharist. He will assure you that regardless of where you are in your spiritual journey you are welcome to come to the table and eat the bread and drink the wine that is our symbolic representation of the last meal that the disciples shared with Jesus before he was crucified and then rose from the dead.

That invitation will attempt to assure you that whether this is your first communion or your umpteenth. Whether you took communion yesterday or it has been over forty years since you last did. If your faith is rock solid, or if you are like me and you still have lots of questions, you are encouraged to follow your heart and join us at the table for sustenance.

After you have shared in this sacred meal and been transformed by it, I invite you to be like the man from Gerasenes. Journey on and spread the good news of how your life has been changed by Jesus.

One of my softball teammates used to have a saying when the first batter stepped up to the plate each inning. "You be the match - you start the fire!"

I would like to challenge each of you in similar fashion. "You be the flame - you spread the light of Hope."

How do you spread Hope you ask? - here are some ideas.

You could smile at a stranger or if you are feeling bold, say hello and wish them a blessed day!

You could write a letter to the local newspaper praising some act of kindness you have witnessed. Perhaps you have 30 minutes to volunteer to sit at the St. James' booth at the Farmers Market on the village green. You might call a parishioner or a neighbor just to check up on them.

If you are feeling particularly moved you could anonymously pay for a cup of coffee for the person in line behind you at the coffee shop.

You might stand up to bigotry that you witness. You might get more involved in a committee here at St. James'. You could attempt to see the face of God in everyone you meet.

There are countless acts of kindheartedness that you can perform that will spread the light of Hope. The essential value lies not in what you choose to do, rather in the fulfillment of the act.

We are all journeying together on this fragile island home we call earth. It is easy to get bogged down with the politics of the day, and the negativity we seem to see in every direction. As Christians we have been commanded to love the Lord our God with our whole heart and mind and soul and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Our corporate worship serves to re-fuel us, to both encourage and challenge us. Spreading hope allows us to evangelize, even if it is covert. As the song proclaims, "they will know we are Christians by our love."

Just before we depart from worship, Deacon Bev will challenge us to go forth to love and serve the Lord. The service has served to strike the match, now it is our task to journey beyond these walls, to be the flame and spread the light of Hope. Amen.