

Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 22
St. Michael's
The Rev. Joshua Wong

Today's Gospel: Luke 8:26-39

Let us pray:

“As the deer longs for the water-brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God.” *Amen.*

Before we begin I'd like to ask you a multiply choice question:

Why are there tailgaters early on a Sunday morning?

A: They don't want their coffee and donuts to get cold?

B: They are late to church?

C: They are probably super stressed out?

If your answer is C, then you are probably right. I don't know about you, but the first time I read today's readings it made me very depressed and stressed out. With Elijah being accused falsely, and the Legion possessing the poor man who had no rest. Maybe because it reminds me too much of how many of us feel in America today. We are exhausted from all that is going on.

In all of our readings, the common thread throughout is that life is chaotic, full of the unknown, and wrapped in a sense of guardedness and hidden fear. No wonder why God asks David, “Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? and why are you so disquieted within me?”

This week, I heard over and over again, the fears that are within our national conversation. America is threatening nations with wars, tariffs, immigration deportations, cost of living spiking upwards, removal of rights from many people, including people who are LGBTQia, and the disregard for freedom of thought and speech. Just last week, only a few miles from where we live, Hispanics in Altadena were being picked up randomly on the street by ICE. My Hispanic friends who are US citizens are fearful of leaving their homes. It begs the question, who is next? Who will be the pawn and victim of our US political leaders?

Similar to the people in the Bible, we may also ask, “Where is your God?”, or “God, I had enough! Even today, many churches are not immune to the disorder, as many are facing cybersecurity hacking. Maybe we feel the same frustration as the Psalmist when he said, “Why have you forgotten me? And why do I go so heavily while the enemy oppresses me?”

Did God really forget us in America in 2025?

In a recent letter from Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe to all our parishes, he speaks about this sense of uncertainty we all face. I have chosen a few key points to share, “In these turbulent times, I have been reflecting on how we Episcopalians

can respond to what is unfolding around us as followers of the Risen Christ whose first allegiance is to the kingdom of God, not to any nation or political party. The unwarranted deployment of the National Guard and U.S. Marine Corps on the streets of Los Angeles also signals a dangerous turn. As Christians committed to strive for justice and peace among all people, we know that there is a better way.

These mainstays of the federal government, designed to safeguard civil society and promote peace and stability, are now being weaponized for political advantage. At its best, our church is capable of moral clarity and resolute commitment to justice. That is not a role we sought—but it is one we are called to. We do not stand alone as we live by our baptismal promises: to persevere in resisting evil, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. In these troubling times, may we find courage and resilience in our identity as members of the Body of Christ.”

During such unknown times, we must hold onto the promises of God and the words of his servants for security and assurance.

During the time of St. Anthony of Padua, who was born in 1195, he had seen a lot of injustice in his lifetime. Hence, he says, 'I saw the snares that the enemy spreads

out over the world, and I said groaning, “What can get through from such snares?” Then I heard a voice saying to me, “Humility.” “Reject pride, and consider everyone more righteous than yourself.” He said, “The devil is afraid of us when we pray and make sacrifices. He is also afraid when we are humble and good.”

In our current social state, it is easy to blame each other. But St. Anthony asks us to reflect instead on the idea of humility and goodness. Do we respond in treating evil for evil, or love for evil? Do we acknowledge our own vulnerability and responsibility that may have contributed in our society that brought us together here? Do we acknowledge the sins of our own nation and how we have treated the indigenous people, the internment of the innocent and the slavery of Black people that God so lovingly made? After acknowledging our own sins, how do we persevere in resisting evil, and respect the dignity of every human being? What is the higher standard that Christ has called us to live? Before we can judge, we need to repent and reform.

As Bishop Rowe suggests, “there is a better way.”

In today's Gospel, we come across a man who was possessed by many demons. Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. In some profound way, each of us could say, "My name is Legion." If we are honest with ourselves, we are all a mysterious mixture of powerful influences that we did not choose — nature, nurture, geography, and culture to name a few. Add to that our own free will that interacts with the loving providence of God.

Even the apostle Paul told his readers that he doesn't fully understand himself. To his readers in Rome, he says, "I do not understand what I do." And to the Corinthians, he said that his life was full of "conflicts without and fears within."

Inside all of us exist parts of darkness and uncontrollable behavior that God is continuously healing and transforming. Mother Teresa, who we imagine as saintly in her work to the poor admits that there were many moments when she entered into spiritual darkness. In her book entitled, *Come Be My Light*, she describes in excruciating detail the spiritual darkness that plagued her for fifty years.

Mother Teresa eventually concluded that her spiritual darkness was not an obstacle to her call from God to serve the poor, but instead central to that call. In her own darkness she was able to better identify with the poor, and share in the sufferings of Christ himself.

Today, God continues to turn our struggles and doubts into transformative power whether we know how he does it or not.

During Elijah's time as a fugitive, God spoke to him, but NOT the way he expected. Standing on Horeb, a "great and powerful wind" blasted the mountain and shattered the rocks, "but the Lord was not in the wind." An earthquake shook the earth, "but the Lord was not in the earthquake." Fire scorched the land, "but the Lord was not in the fire."

Then it says, "there came a gentle whisper."

Is your life filled with unexpected paths? Are you looking for some dramatic answer from God? Just maybe, God will speak to you in a gentle whisper. This is what St. Anthony meant about humility. It is also what Mother Theresa had to experience before she could serve the poor. It starts with humility and an open heart in prayer.

The idea that God works in us by a gentle whisper came from an insightful conversation I had with Jorge about his role as the leader of the Hispanic group at Kinecta, where he works. He has given me permission to share this conversation with you even though he is out of town today for work. He was sharing with me about how fearful many Hispanics at his company are feeling about random deportations by ICE. Our conversation reminds me of how Elijah must have felt as an innocent fugitive. The more I heard Jorge share, the more I realized that he plays the role of a bridge builder between the vulnerable and the powerful. He can play that role because of his lived experience. Because of his life story as a person of color, as a gay man, and as a person who had to fight for his rights, and now as a person who holds positional power at his company, Jorge is able to comfort, empathize and be a part of change. God in his life is leading him with Christian mercy to everyone in his Hispanic group. Hence, his presence has helped many colleagues find comfort and visibility.

Isn't this the sacred work of the Holy Spirit? It sometimes comes quietly, we just need to be open to it. The wind that came upon the disciples at Pentecost is the same wind that came to Elijah in a gentle whisper. She never stops placing us in opportunities that shine the light of Christ in our broken world. Even during the hopeless moments when we say, "Lord, I have had enough."

God asks you today, "Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? And why are you so disquieted within me? "Put your trust in God, for I will yet give thanks to him, who is the help of my countenance, and my God."

In these tumultuous times, don't be afraid, instead, spend time in meditation, and remember God's faithfulness and our call to justice. Our Collect of the day says, "For God never fails to help and govern those whom God have set upon the sure foundation of His loving-kindness. *Amen*