

**The Second Sunday after Pentecost**  
Sunday, June 19, 2022 (Proper 7, Year C, Track 2)  
Preached by the Rev. Lisa M. Erdeljon  
St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Southport, NC  
Isaiah 65:1-9; Psalm 22:18-27; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39

*“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me”*

You know the Episcopal Church's saying, “God Loves You! No Exceptions!” or “God loves everyone; no exceptions”

I've been thinking about it a lot recently.

I suspect you all have probably thought about it, too.

Especially since I've talked about it in more than one sermon.

That saying is one of the foundational tenets of my personal faith.

And, obviously, one of the foundational teachings of the Episcopal Church.

God loves everyone; no exceptions.

It's easy to think about that idea and agree with it when the “everyone” is you, and your spouse, and your family.

Your neighbors—you know, the ones you get along with—and your friends and of course, especially your church family.

But it starts to get challenging when you have to face people that, maybe, you don't fully agree with—

Like people who sit on the other side of a political divide or social divide or even the divide that emerges from basic habits and lifestyles.

Of course, looking at the reading from Galatians, where Paul proudly proclaims: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”

Of course looking at that passage helps us feel comfort—or at least, I hope it helps us feel comfort—in knowing that just as someone who disagrees with us is also loved by God, so we are loved by God, as we disagree with that someone.

God loves everyone. No exception.

It isn't just an “out there” everyone. It's also a “me—right here” and a “you—with whom, perhaps, I don't completely agree with” everyone.

And like I said, I've preached on this a few times.

If you come to Wednesday's Eucharist, then you've heard it even more!

Often, "God loves you. All of you. No matter what!" is basically the thesis statement of just about every Wednesday Eucharist sermon

Okay, that's not completely true: there was at least a sermon on Thomas Cranmer and a sermon on double predestination...

But overall, I *like* to preach the message that "God loves you!"

I like it because it's a good message to repeat. Over and over again.

Like a mantra.

Repeating it to yourself in the mirror every morning.

God loves you. No exception.

No exception within who you are—your body, your parts, the pieces that make up you.

No exceptions with who you are—in society, in your family, in the community.

And also, no exceptions with who anyone is.

God loves you. No exceptions.

But another reason why I like to preach this message is because it's also a really, *really* hard message to hear and think through and process and believe.

Because "God loves everyone."

God saves everyone.

God's grace is extended to everyone.

This can be particularly challenging when we're looking at the world today.

At the evil that seems to lurk everywhere!

*It's funny. I preached on this theology: God loves everyone—this past Wednesday—and in post-service banter, a friend said, "You know, I'm still not sure I believe in that"*

*And I promised that I would preach on why—why God **has** to love **EVERYONE**—<quote> "soon"*

*And I had every intention of preaching on it—I don't know... maybe next Wednesday... or maybe in the Fall...*

*But then, it sat with me.*

*This idea of how **hard** it could be to reconcile a God who loves **everyone** with all the evil that **does** lurk in the world.*

*And when something sits with a preacher—especially as heavily as it sat with me this week—then it’s bound to come out in a sermon a lot sooner than “soon”*

So...

Yes. Evil seems to lurk everywhere!

We can look at the Gospel reading from today.

We can see a man, not even named but instead identified as the demoniac.

Like that is even a name!?!?

A man tortured by demons.

Demons who so thoroughly control his life that he cannot wear clothes. He must live in the tombs—among the dead—because the dead cannot complain, and he is practically there, already!

And not just some demons.

But a Legion of demons.

“What is your name?”

“Legion”—for many demons had entered him.

*Legion, by the way, is a military term. It classifies a quantity of military soldiers.*

*Legion is approximately 6,000 Roman soldiers.*

*6,000 occupying forces.*

So this man, who is occupied by a legion of demons, falls to his knees, begging Jesus to let him go.

Just as the demons are begging Jesus for mercy! Begging Jesus to let them go, too.

The evil of demons lurking inside this man—destroying his life.

And then, as Jesus saves this man from his occupying forces...

Evil occurs again.

Because the demons go into the herd of swine—of pigs.

And then, the pigs run down the hill and into the lake and drown.

It's no wonder the swineherds were upset. And asked Jesus to leave!

Because, in the act of saving one man from a legion of demons, those demons hurt a whole community by destroying their profession—their livelihood.

Afterall, what is a swineherd when all the swine are dead?

And we don't have to even look at Scripture.

We can simply look around us today. In the here and now.

We can see evil lurking in politicians who pass laws to thicken their wallets.

In medical test results that imply a life is about to end way sooner than expected.

In senseless acts of violence that lead to the deaths of people we love, and even people we've never met.

Deaths of civilians in countries far away.

Deaths of school children several states away.

Deaths of fellow Episcopalians enjoying a potluck supper on church property—oh yeah! That news broke Thursday night, as I was starting to prepare for this sermon.

We can see evil lurking in recent history and far-off history.

In the choices people make whom we love—when they choose to hurt us instead.

In the circumstances that don't even imply anyone made a choice at all—like abuse of natural resources, which lead to famine and hunger and what is commonly referred to as “natural disasters”

We can see evil lurking in betrayal and broken promises.

In heartbreak and stolen goods—even the non-tangible goods, like our time, when it seems our time is being wasted!

And yet, even with all of this—this evil that seems to lurk everywhere!

That seems to hide in corners, waiting for our wills to weaken just a little bit—waiting for our walls to start to crumble just a little bit...

Waiting to seep into society and overturn all that we strive for when we strive for a good and just society

Even with all of this evil,

God still **must** love everyone! With absolutely no exception!

And here is why.

Because God is the most powerful. The most loving. The most EVERYTHING that is good.

And I don't mean good as in "yum! This vanilla ice cream is good!"

I mean a good that is far deeper and far bigger and far vaster and far greater than any concept we can muster in an attempt at defining God.

If God does **not** love **everyone** then that means evil wins.

And we all know—we all fully and truly believe—that evil will NEVER win!

Because of God.

And thus, if we believe in an all-loving God, then we must also believe that, even in the midst of the most evil of evils we could possibly imagine (and I know you all are thinking of evils you have witnessed in the world and in history)—

Even in the most evil of evils we could possibly imagine, God must still overcome.

Because if God does not overcome, then God is not the Almighty, the Creator, the One—the one that we profess to love and live according to His teachings.

...

That's another interesting piece about today's Gospel reading.

It proves this.

It proves that God must be more powerful than evil.

That God has absolute dominion over evil and an unparalleled compassion for those who seem lost

Because not even a <quote> "legion" from the demonic realm can keep Jesus from restoring this man, who has lived in torment for so long—even a legion cannot keep Jesus from restoring this man and allowing him to return to his home—his life—his place as one of God's beloved who also is able to love.

This Gospel passage reminds us that Jesus comes to challenge and cast out **every** power that prevents us from living fully and freely as human beings created in God's image!

And it shows us that, even in the midst of our own battles against evil.

In the midst of the world's battles against evil.

We do not ever have to fight evil on our own.

We, as Christians, **always** have Jesus—always have **God**—on our side.

No. That's not quite right.

Because it's not that **God** is always on **our** side.

It's that **we** are always on **God's** side.

When we choose to be Christian—truly and fully and completely—when we choose to know and love an all-powerful and all-**GOOD** God, then we choose to align with God's all-powerful goodness.

Even when—or especially when—it's hardest to see that good.

“God loves everyone. No exception!”

It is hard!

It is hard to believe!

It is hard to understand!

It is hard to accept!

The good news—we don't have to.

All we have to do is love God. And love our neighbors.

And believe that, when the time comes—when Jesus returns to save all people—then the evil that lurks—even in the souls that seem to be nothing but evil—

**ALL** of the evil in the world will be thoroughly and completely tossed out.

Drowned.

Cast aside and destroyed in a way that only the Creator of the Universe can do—in a way that even science does not fully explain.

Yes, it is very hard to reconcile the fact that evil exists in the world at the same time that God loves every. Single. Person. On earth. Ever!

And **that** is why it is so important to say it to yourself. To make it a motto. To make it a tenet of what we believe.

Evil will not overcome—even in the darkest moments of our lives—because God is greater than that!

And so, one more time: God loves you. You! Everyone! Here and everywhere!

God loves you! No exceptions!

Amen.

