Isaiah 65:1–9

**I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me;**

**I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me.**

 **I said, “Here I am, here I am,”**

**to a nation that was not called by my name.**

 **2 I spread out my hands all the day**

**to a rebellious people,**

 **who walk in a way that is not good,**

**following their own devices;**

 **3 a people who provoke me**

**to my face continually,**

 **sacrificing in gardens**

**and making offerings on bricks;**

 **4 who sit in tombs,**

**and spend the night in secret places;**

 **who eat pig’s flesh,**

**and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels;**

 **5 who say, “Keep to yourself,**

**do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.”**

 **These are a smoke in my nostrils,**

**a fire that burns all the day.**

 **6 Behold, it is written before me:**

**“I will not keep silent, but I will repay;**

 **I will indeed repay into their lap**

 **7 both your iniquities and your fathers’ iniquities together,**

**says the Lord;**

 **because they made offerings on the mountains**

 **I will measure into their lap**

**payment for their former deeds.”**

 **8 Thus says the Lord:**

 **“As the new wine is found in the cluster,**

**and they say, ‘Do not destroy it,**

**for there is a blessing in it,’**

 **so I will do for my servants’ sake,**

**and not destroy them all.**

 **9 I will bring forth offspring from Jacob,**

**and from Judah possessors of my mountains;**

 **my chosen shall possess it,**

**and my servants shall dwell there.**

Galatians 3:23–4:7

**Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.  4I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 4But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.**

Luke 8:26–39

**Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. 28When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.” 29For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) 30Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. 31And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. 32Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.**

**34When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. 35Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. 36And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. 37Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 38The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.**

Given our necessity to be politically correct, we might struggle with the events surrounding this text.  “Why did Jesus let the demons enter the pigs and they all die. Surely He knew what was going to happen.  Doesn’t that have a certain ring of animal cruelty to it?  Why is Jesus negotiating with demons?  Why is He granting them their wish?  Why not just destroy them?”

Perhaps the best way to answer all these nagging questions is to get back to basics and first ask a very fundamental question.  This may serve as an interpretive lens and answer key to all these other nagging questions surrounding this text.  So let me ask, “Why does God do anything at all?” The answer: For the good of His people.  God permits and allows things to happen, good or bad, all for the good of His people and for their salvation.  In a very real way, EVERYTHING in life, good and bad, should be recognized as another teaching moment, another wake-up call to repentance, and another reminder of God’s Word and promise.

Unfortunately, we often miss the teaching moments in life because we’re too busy throwing a pity party for ourselves or trying to second-guess or “out god” God.  We’ll help God out.  We’ll do this, and we won’t do that.  We’re in charge, and we’re going to do our best to avoid any and all crosses in our lives.  It’s sad to say, but we even sometimes miss the teaching moments right before us in the words of Holy Scripture because we’re so caught up in ourselves rather than listening to what God has to say to us.

So when we look at a text we often get fixated on certain things and wind up missing the excellent teaching opportunity for God’s people of faith.  Here we tend to pay a lot of our attention on the demons and the pigs.  Of course, that’s not to say that we completely omit the human element from our focus.  We do take note of the man who had all the demons exorcised from him.  We know that he certainly needed Christ.  No one would disagree that God worked these things for his good and for his salvation.  We also don’t forget all the townsfolk who heard from the pig herders about this man Jesus and what He had done with their flock.  These people needed to be taught the truth of the deadliness of sin and the life that is known only in Christ Jesus?  Yes, we know that God worked these things for their good and their salvation.

But we still often overlook something very important in the text; the main point of the whole story, in fact.  We fail to notice that Jesus’ disciples, God’s people of faith, were with Him the entire time this was going down.  They had just sailed Him across the Sea of Galilee and were right with Him during this whole terrifying/miraculous encounter.  Did they need to be taught the truth of the deadliness of sin and the life that is known only in Christ?  Do you?

Let’s face it, we’re the ones the devil is working on the hardest!  The devil doesn’t care about those who have no knowledge of Christ and His Gospel truth or about those who have no desire to be a part of Christ and who are home worshipping the “mattress god” or the “fishing god” right now. The devil cares about you, and not in a good way!  He hates you and your saving faith andn that you’re here having that same faith fed and nourished by your Lord and Savior.  He wants nothing more than to steal that faith and life away from you.  Deadly, sinful misery loves company, and the devil would like nothing more than to have you join him in his hellish, miserable suffering.

When I say that this event is a teaching moment for God’s people, I don’t just mean in a “scared straight” kind of way.  What’s happening here is that Jesus is actually reinforcing a previous teaching with this practical, real-life experience, providing His disciples a glimpse of reality and truth.  It might come as a surprise to you when I tell you that I’m referring to the parable of the seed sower but I’ll tell you that the disciples connected the two. I’ll guarantee that anyone who heard this lesson in the original Greek later on would think the same exact thing.

The reason is in the word that we translate as “drowned.” You see, that word—apolēgō—literally means “choked.” There are only two times this word is used in the entire New Testament, here and the parable of the seed sower.  In the parable, the seed which is cast among thorns and thistles sprouts up, but is soon choked out/drowned by those weeds and dies.  Jesus even goes on to explain that that particular seed represents those who hear the Word of God, but as they go their way they are choked out by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit doesn’t mature.  It’s choked out.  It drowns.  It dies.

It’s also very interesting that this parable is located in the very same chapter; mere verses before the whole exorcism/pig stampeding event!  Jesus literally taught His disciples this parable and then showed them the reality of this parable, theory then practical. So Jesus taught the parable on one side of the lake, then they all got in the boat and started crossing to the other side, encountered a storm in the middle of the journey (which He stilled with just one word) and then upon arriving, they set foot on-shore and encounter the demons and pigs.  “Here is what a choked out/drowned seed of faith looks like, a herd of pigs stampeding to their own death and demise.” How’s that for reinforcing?

You see, Jesus was showing His followers, His Christian disciples, and us what the way of faith looks like in this fallen and sinful world.  More specifically, He was showing them, and us, what the absence of faith looks like and results in, death.  You see, absence of faith doesn’t mean mere emptiness and void, as if there’s a vacancy in your soul.  Your God given soul will not stay empty for long.  It will be filled.  It just won’t be filled with God.  The devil is more than happy to fill that void any way he can.  As I said earlier, the devil works the hardest on the most faithful.  These disciples were constantly at the greatest risk of losing life-eternal simply because life in the “here and now” could get a little uncomfortable.  Jesus was showing them what the end result of that proverbial “choking/drowning” meant: death and damnation.  It didn’t matter whether or not Abraham and Jacob were their forefathers.  It didn’t matter what good deeds they had done or how famous they were or how much money they put in the offering plate.  Without faith in Christ, the end result would be no different than the pigs, Death.

Christ still holds this lesson out to us, His followers and children by faith.  The ways of the world still entice us and seduce us.  The constant threat of being drowned and choked to death by the demonic, evil influences of our fallen and sinful world is ever-present, drugs, alcohol, the good life, only me myself and I.  I know what it’s like to have the heat turned up in life.  I know what it’s like to suffer and struggle, just like you do.  There’s not one of us here who can honestly say that they’ve never given in to the temptation of ease and turned their back on God or, at the very least, looked to Him as a last resort instead of rightly looking to Him first; instead of only looking to Him and clinging to Him, and Him alone, as our mighty rock of salvation, peace, and comfort.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, life is tough.  I know.  Look to Christ.  Listen to Christ.  “Alleluia!  Lord, to whom shall we go?  You have the words of eternal life!” May this blessed, faithful confession of the disciples be your faithful reality as well.  May you, like the demon possessed man who was dead and possessed, but made alive by Christ and His Word, depart in peace and freely proclaim all that your Lord has done for you with His perfect life, death, and resurrection, and all that He still does for you in His Word and His life-giving Sacraments. AMEN.