

***Now for something completely different!***

*Isaiah 65<sup>1-9</sup>; Psalm 22<sup>19-28</sup>; Galatians 3<sup>23-end</sup>; Luke 8<sup>26-39</sup>*

*Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.  
[Luke 8:39]*

Did you think at the beginning of this week that Orlando would see the greatest number killed in a gun attack in recent years?

Or did you imagine that the heavens would try to show us how much water they contain?

Or could you ever conceive that a serving British MP could be fatally attacked on UK soil as happened to Jo Cox this week?

A week with lots of things we didn't expect should have driven all Christians to their knees.

Who knows what will happen in this coming week - will we in or out of Europe at this point next week?

How do you respond when God breaks the rules and he doesn't do what is expected of him?

That's the feeling I get at the end of the story of the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac: Jesus called his disciples to follow him, but this one he told to stay exactly where he was - **go to your home and declare how much God has done for you?** - and that is really quite funny, because we lean right at the beginning of this story that this man had no home as **he lived among the tombs** and that he didn't need a suitcase to do that as he wore no clothes!

Would it work if we cast the demons out of the rough sleepers in the Churchyard and sent them into the geese in Handsworth Park?

Our Old Testament reading and the Psalm hold no such surprises today - general religious stuff about human beings preferring pagan religions because they are a lot more fun, but that for the few that are faithful God is on their side and the usual deal is struck - God does the right things for his people and then his people will praise him.

However, in Galatians and in the Gospel, there are surprises that challenge what we believe and how we act:

In Galatians we are told that in Christ we are all equal!

Paul has used that ordinary example of the law being the slave that kept the students awake during lessons. In modern terms, the law is an LSA tasked with keeping a pupil paying attention. But that discipline gives way to faith and faith in Christ saves us.

The divisions in society are then in place are blown away:

- ✦ you may have been a Jew or a Greek culturally (with all the prejudice and snobbery involved) but being in Christ is more important than any cultural identity;
- ✦ you might be a slave or you may be free, but being In Christ is more important than your role in society;
- ✦ we may be male or female, but being In Christ supersedes even gender.

God doesn't break the rules, he removes them: the only division now is In Christ or outside of Christ! Those clothed In Christ should always be identifiable!

The Gospel is a fascinating story of recognition.

The demons know Jesus - he is certainly identifiable - and they know their fate is sealed! The demons are exercised and negotiate their exit into the pigs, who jump off a cliff And the man that was deranged is, in Christ, then sane and sociable!

But at the end the man is sent back rather than allowed to follow. He is sent to his **friends** but he has no friends and the implication is that by telling people about God he will make friends!

He isn't the only one challenged - the swine herds were now redundant: Jesus gave them a chance to recreate themselves in a way they hadn't imagined when they got up that day!

God isn't contained within our expectations or confined within our imaginations. We are to live out the Gospel where we are so that those around us know that being **In Christ** is for us genuine and for them plausible.

We don't need answers to difficult questions - like flood or guns - or even think that much of political activity matters. We can't hold God accountable for human actions or stupidity!

- ✦ Can God be held accountable for a nation that will not restrict the sale or availability of guns?
- ✦ Can God be held accountable for people putting concrete everywhere - especially on their front gardens - so that water has nowhere to go?
- ✦ Can God be held accountable for everyone who chooses to act violently or in ways we don't like?

Every act of free will limits the free will of someone else.

Being In Christ gives us a different perspective! It isn't a cosy security but a demanding responsibility able and ready to meet the surprises that meet us!