

Isaiah 65:1-9 • Psalm 22:18-27 • Galatians 3:23-29 • Luke 8:26-39 • Proper 7 Year C • 10am -- June 20, 2010 • St. Thomas, Hanover, New Hampshire

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In this service today here at St. Thomas, we engage in our worship through an additional lens that is a major musical setting of the Mass. It is offered by our Organist/Choirmaster and an enlarged Parish Choir to lift and perhaps shift our worship. This change of lens reminds me of when I go to the optometrist to have my eyes tested and there are different lenses placed in front of my eyes. The letters on the chart come in and out of focus, as each new lens provides its own nuance. The goal, of course, is that there will be one lens that, when applied, brings all into focus.

If you've been here to worship before, you know that some parts of our service remain the same each week and some parts change. Each part, from the Collect to the Readings to the Eucharistic Prayer *can* be the catalyst for a new insight regarding our relationship to God, to one another, and to ourselves.

Today, the lens that may bring everything into focus for you may be our special music, presented following much planning and practice. We gratefully acknowledge the hours of rehearsal and the discipline that it takes to provide music for our worship this week and every week. It is only after the rigors of practice that music can soar with freedom.

This is a similar message to that which Paul was trying to deliver to the Galatians in the passage that was read this morning. The laws of Judaism had been a discipline for the people--teaching them, guiding them. Participating in life within this demanding

framework had defined God's people, but now a new way had come. Ignoring the new way was to be stuck in the past. Then, in Paul's view, the law would be a prison, holding the people back from living to their fullest spiritual potential and keeping them segregated into a closed and restrictive group.

But now, because of Christ, faith has come and they can live spiritually in a new freedom because they are children of God through faith. Relationship with God was open to all without distinction. This was radical news! No longer did it matter if you were a Jew or a Gentile, a man or a woman, all—all—could freely receive the gift of relationship with God. No longer was there the necessity of religious separation; in Christ it is as if we all are Abraham's offspring, all of us heirs with Christ because God promised. The discipline of being anchored to a certain set of rules was no longer needed and fullness of life was a gift freely offered to all, and all may accept God's gift by faith.

The composer of our Mass today, Franz Schubert, lived a short life of only thirty-one years and he was not notably religious. He wrote this particular Mass when he was only eighteen. It was never popular in his lifetime and was, in fact, only published for the first time seventeen years after his death.

There are a couple of anomalies there: a non-religious person creating music that provides an uplifting, worshipful setting of traditionally faith-filled words. And second, that it could have been so thoroughly rejected in his day and be so popular and regularly presented in ours.

The healing story in today's Gospel also presents us with several anomalies, reactions that are inconsistent with what we might expect. First, in many, if not most of

the healing stories in the Gospels, Jesus seems to want to attract very little attention. In this case, there are many attention grabbing details—Jesus in conversation with a crazed, shouting man; the swine rushing down the steep bank; the townspeople quickly gathering to see for themselves what had happened. This was Gentile, unclean territory and Jesus was engaged in ministry with abandon.

Second, the people did not come out to rejoice in this miracle, in the healing of this rather notorious man. Instead, they were afraid – so much so that they *all* asked Jesus to leave. This is a very different reaction from previous situations where people responded to one healing by bringing many more people who could benefit from meeting Jesus. But *these* people shunned not only Jesus, but also the possibilities that further relationship with him might have allowed. They were keeping themselves closed off from change because of their great fear.

And then Luke records another unusual moment. The healed man begs to get in the boat with Jesus and come along across the sea. He was not held back in his desire by family or riches or any of the other stumbling blocks that had held others back. But Jesus refused him, instead telling him to go home and declare how much God had done for him. And Luke says he did just that.

The fact is Jesus gave him the same mission that you and I have: continue in your daily lives, where you are, and let others know what God has done for you. I know. We're Episcopalians. There isn't much that makes us more nervous than a statement like that. Declaring what God has done takes many forms, including forms that do not use words at all. Make no mistake. People do observe how we live. It's a good idea

periodically to take an inventory. What are our priorities? Are we ready to answer when someone asks us why we go to church? Do we ever invite someone to come along with us?

I wish I knew what had become of the man from the tombs in the country of the Geresenes. I wonder what his life was like after his encounter with Jesus and I wonder whether he made a difference in the lives of others.

I do know that even though Jesus is not physically here with us, we are not alone. God is still calling to us as he called to the people in Isaiah's day: "Here I am, here I am." We can find God in prayer. We can be fed and strengthened by God in our gathering and participation in the Eucharist. By the Holy Spirit, God can make a difference in our lives, transforming us into a people whose lives are a new creation, free and empowered to proclaim what God has done for us. May you seek and find God here today and be strengthened to proclaim him in word and deed. Amen.