

Pastor Troy E. Medlin
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Legion No More

Pastor Kip Bernard Banks Sr. writes “Juneteenth is sacred to me. It's not merely a holiday. It's a homecoming of the spirit, a holy moment of truth-telling, a faithful act of remembrance.” Juneteenth recalls the day that the news of the emancipation proclamation had reached Texas following the civil war.

She continues, “My ancestors were enslaved in Galveston, Texas, by the city’s founder. They were people of faith who believed that one day their freedom would come, just as it did for the children of Israel. And when that day finally arrived on June 19, 1865, they rejoiced.” This day has long been celebrated by our black siblings, and has more recently become a part of wider culture. For many, Juneteenth is a day for truth-telling. Honesty. Naming realities about our society, our history, and even ourselves. As Lutherans we do not hide from uncomfortable truths, we face them head on. Welcome them. We call a thing what it is. Truths like the way racism and so many other things possess us. KeepIng ourselves and others from experiencing the abundant life of God. The life that always feels like freedom.

After calming the storm, Jesus reaches the far side of the sea. He is now in a land of difference. Opposite Galilee. Unfamiliar country. Gentile territory. A strange land. He has crossed borders and boundaries seen and unseen. He had suffered for a long time, wore no clothes, and lived in tombs and not in houses. The others in the village had tried to care for him. Protect him. Keep him safe. But to little or no avail.

He initiates. Shouting. In agony. Jesus persists- Not seized by fear but driven by divine love that always draws close where others shrink back. “What is your name?” Jesus asks. A compassionate and brave question. He responds: *legion*. This name or names, a Roman military term referring to 5000 soldiers. He was possessed by many demons. Somewhere in the midst of the encounter with Jesus and the act of naming those demons they leave his body.

The 2024 movie *I Saw The TV Glow* follows two teenagers as they explore and try to make sense of their own often troubled lives. They bond over a fictional world of a TV show that brings them out of isolation at least for brief moments. The story is about coming of age and wrestling with questions of identity. The thread throughout the whole story is the power of shame, fear, and the unknown to possess us. Hold sway over us. So much so that even during brief moments of

recognition, seeing each other for who they really are, they could not imagine naming the truth about themselves out loud. The story ends mostly in despair. Tragic. Sad.

The truth is that the things that keep us bound are legion. We know all too well what it is to be possessed by many things: shame, fear, and the unknown just to name a few (whether we call them demons or not.) They can hold sway over us. Keeping us from ourselves and one another.

Encountered by Jesus, he asked our name, bravely and compassionately, how might we respond? What are the names of those things we are in bondage to, as we say in our confession? Personally, collectively?

As a culture, we would name *violence*. Political and otherwise. The addiction to using power over others. Believing the lie that violence is ever the answer.

There are other things that keep us in tombs- made by others, this broken world, others that we fit for ourselves, as sin and death conspire together. Pride. The pursuit of status. Control. Failure. Nostalgia. Defending ourselves. Legion.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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. Clothed. You are held in that spacious covering of Christ that stretches out to embrace all that we are and all that we carry. It reaches beyond every grave. You dwell no longer in tombs but in the house of God.

In that capacious canopy, all has been taken care of. You belong. With death itself undone, we are free to call a thing what it is. Name what possesses us. Speak it out loud. No need to keep it buried. You were buried with Christ and have been raised again. Hear Christ speak your name out loud. Beloved. Not afraid or far away--- only drawing close and opening up a new future for your flesh as he gives his as food for you.

As we will sing, "Once long ago in Galilee you sailed to storm tossed shores and still in power you brave new paths to breach our bolted doors. Yours and mine." What are beyond those bolted doors? Out in the open we walk with our unnamed brother and that same Christ as we get acquainted with resurrection life. Growing into that new garment. Here we have room to imagine that tomorrow could be different from today. A new name is a gift that comes to you. What might you be called on this side of Easter? It feels like a breath of fresh air. Weight off your chest. Possibility. Room. Grace. Acceptance. And always like freedom. You know it when it comes to you. Clothed and in his right mind he is sent to declare all that Jesus had done for him.

