

The Hand of God

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Greg Bohlken

The Holy Gospel according to St Matthew,
the 8th Chapter

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

Matthew 8:28-34

When he came to the other side, to the region of the Gadarenes, two men possessed by demons came out of the tombs and met him. They were so fierce that no one could pass that way. Suddenly they shouted, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now a large herd of swine was feeding at some distance from them. The demons begged him, "If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine." And he said to them, "Go!" So they came out and entered the swine, and suddenly, the whole herd stampeded down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the water. The swineherds ran off, and, going into the town, they told the whole story about what had happened to the men possessed by demons. Then the whole

town came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they begged him to leave their region.

This is the Good News, the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

Living in a tomb cave because the neighbors were afraid of the demon. Think about suffering that level of isolation and loneliness and confusion – perhaps sometimes you can relate. Think of how different life must have been, then, once Jesus cast out the demons. Now, there's *reconnection* and *purpose* and *community* and *friends* that couldn't exist in the demon-bound isolation.

The hand of God worked not only in the immediate healing but also in the *healed life*: the outcast being brought back from isolation, reconnected and restored to wholeness.

When we see the hand of God, we are moved to gratitude.

We often see Jesus healing the immediate situation so that lives can be restored to wholeness.

- Zaccheus was outcast, and Jesus chose to have dinner with him which led to repentance and new life – healed relationships.
- The 10 lepers were outcast because their community was afraid of catching leprosy, and in Jesus' healing the barrier was removed and they could rejoin their families.
- The woman who bled for 12 years was outcast, in a perpetual state of being ceremonially unclean, and when she touched the hem of Jesus' robe the healing allowed her to return home to experience the treasure of community.

God is a God of relationships.

Into lives of hurt and pain, God's hand brings healing and restoration.

Into lives of isolation and despair, God's hand connects to community.

Into lives of wondering and confusion, God's hand weaves purpose and direction.

When we see the hand of God we are moved to gratitude.

We are thankful today for Elmer's life of witness and courage.

- When his mom got sick, young Elmer quit school to work to support the family.
- At age 18 he got drafted into World War II to crash-land gliders behind enemy lines.
- To provide for his family, he worked in brickyards and raised 5000 chickens, plus dairy cows and mowed lawns on the side.
- Through Elmer's testimony we see the hand of God and we are moved to gratitude.

Here, through Faith Lutheran Church, we see the hand of God and are moved to gratitude. We see folks who are hungry being fed, folks in addiction finding new life in recovery, folks despairing in isolation being visited and welcomed and included, children taught the stories of our faith, God's voice sought and discerned in our gatherings, a vision of purpose and restoration and hope and healing for the world. Look at all that God can do through

us together! When we see the hand of God, we are moved to gratitude.

In a few weeks we'll respond in gratitude as we celebrate generosity by writing down our intended financial giving to Faith Lutheran Church. I am honored to be able to pledge and give back to God for all God does through us at Faith Lutheran Church. I know that my pledge matters because pledging allows us to discern and plan together how to best use the resources God has shared through all of us as we dream about God's future for our community.

Look at all the God can do through us when we work together!

Like Elmer concludes in his video, *There's something in my life that ain't done yet – I don't know what it is, or I wouldn't be here*. Let's follow in Elmer's faithful steps – trusting that the hand of God will continue to guide us into lives of gratitude and generosity.