

“Pig Out” GPPC 6-19-16
1 Kings 19:1-15, Luke 8:26-39

It’s summertime. So Hollywood is releasing a plethora of movies to provide us with profound intellectual and spiritual enrichment. Just kidding. They’re going to show the usual mindless junk we love.

When I was a kid we used to go and see summertime horror movies of all sorts. There were the vampire movies. Titles included, “Dracula,” “Dracula A.D. 1972” (Can you *dig* it?), and the ever-popular “Taste the Blood of Dracula.”

There were plenty of other scary movies too. Anybody remember “Carrie”? An acquaintance of mine had seen that flick before, but went to see it again with a friend. And when the surprise ending came and Carrie’s hand reached out of the grave, this guy reached over and grabbed his friend’s leg. I think he about wet his pants.

Of course, “The Exorcist” with its demon-possessed, head-swiveling, pea soup-vomiting, cuss word-spewing teenage girl spawned a particular genre of horror movie that focuses on evil that must be

Jeff Paschal

exorcised. The summer of 2016's descendent is "The Conjuring 2."

Anybody planning to see it? Me neither.

I don't watch many horror movies these days. Maybe I've outgrown them, but probably not. I suppose I don't watch as many because there's enough horror in the world without adding to it. Who needs horror movies? We have reality instead.

The carnage in Orlando is still fresh in our minds, and America leads the advanced countries of the world in death by gun violence. But Congress refuses to allow the CDC even to *study* the issue of gun violence, much less suggest policy changes that might help. We can do better, can't we?

There is still bigotry against our LGBT brothers and sisters and racism against African-Americans, Hispanics, and Latinos. The entire Islamic faith is blamed for terrorism, but there are 1.6 billion Muslims on the earth and about 100,000 in ISIS or .00625% of Islam. Compare that to the Ku Klux Klan and the Christian faith. Does anyone call the KKK, "Radical *Christians*" or "*Christian Terrorists*"?

Jeff Paschal

Climate change is upon us with plant and animal species threatened, cities being engulfed, and calamity coming at us like a freight train, but politicians turn the other way or say, “Gosh, I don’t know. I’m not a scientist.”

And we look at our own lives and, if we’re honest, we know we are not what we could and should be. We don’t need to watch horror movies. They are all around us, and sometimes we are the directors and producers.

Luke says Jesus came to the country of the Gerasenes, a mainly non-Jewish area. And right after he stepped out of the boat a demon-possessed man met him. Immediately we sophisticated and educated 21st century Americans are met with a problem, aren’t we? Sure, we’ve seen “The Exorcist” and its heirs, but those are just Hollywood horror movies. We’re not so sure about demons.

But Cuban-American theologian Justo González says we’ve been deceived about evil. We’ve imagined through the centuries that it can be defeated by implementing the right political or economic systems. Surely one of these systems would bring heaven on earth. But that’s

Jeff Paschal

obviously not the case. Or evil could be explained away by modern science as disease or weather or natural process. Or evil could be just a little bit of harmless temptation to be laughed off. “The devil made me do it,” said comedian Flip Wilson.

But evil is seductive, secretive, and unbelievably powerful.

González writes, “...The truth is that the Bible does not explain evil, and does even try to do so...What Scripture does say is that evil exists, that there is true opposition to and rebellion against the will of God ... We can and must oppose evil, but overcome it we cannot. (Justo González, *Luke*, 70-72.)

Luke says the man who met Jesus was possessed by demons. Evil had taken hold of him in ways immediately visible. “For a long time,” Luke says, “he’d worn no clothes.” And, clothes, of course, confer not only privacy, but self-respect and appropriate boundaries with other human beings. This poor man had lost all that.

“And,” Luke says, “He didn’t live in a house, but in the tombs.” Instead of a house, a place of shelter from the elements, shelves lined with little knick-knacks, a favorite chair and coffee mug, a home of

Jeff Paschal

welcome and protection from the world, this man lived in the tombs.

And rather than a living community to support, encourage, and challenge him, he had only death as his neighbor. The man no longer knew who he was. Instead, he lived surrounded, infiltrated, infested by death.

And where are you and I living?

We've all experienced this death to one extent or another, haven't we? A deep depression that will not lift. A gnawing sense of failure or inadequacy or unworthiness we cannot shake. An addiction that drives and shapes our every waking moment. Physical suffering that grinds away at us. Icy fear of what is coming. Anger and hatred and revenge that boil inside us. We've all tasted death's bitter communion. As one person puts it, "We all wrestle with being held captive in some way."

(Lynne M. Deming, *Weavings*, Feb./Mar./Apr. 2014, 2.)

But this pitiful man seems to have been completely taken over by the demonic. Evil's power in him was so fearsome people couldn't even keep him chained up. Nobody was a match for the evil working in him. His situation was hopeless.

Jeff Paschal

But then he met Jesus. Luke says the man fell down before Jesus and yelled at the top of his lungs, or at least the demons yelled. And notice what they yelled. “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torment me...”

So right away evil knew who it was facing—Jesus, God’s Son, the One to whom we and all creation owe our total adoration and devotion. And evil also knew it had no chance of winning against Jesus, the ultimate power of God’s love. No chance. So evil just tried to negotiate a little. “I beg you, do not torment me, please, please, *ugly* please.” (It was evil; it couldn’t say *pretty* please.)

So Jesus said, “What’s your name?” “Legion,” said the demons. And the people would’ve immediately identified with the Roman legions running their lives with ruthless cruelty. But in the presence of Jesus, “Legion” was in no position to run anything anymore. It tried to bargain with Jesus one more time. “Please don’t send us back into the abyss.”

And here’s the surprise—Jesus accepted their offer. Luke says there were these pigs, these unclean pigs grazing on a hillside. The demons begged to enter them, and Jesus said yes.

Jeff Paschal

And then things went wild. This herd of pigs ran and jumped off the cliff and drowned in a lake.

Now in our 21st century minds this seems terribly unfair. What's Jesus doing bumping off these pigs? PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) will not be amused. Does Jesus have a bumper sticker that reads, "PETA—People Eating Tasty Animals"? Is that what this is?

No. One Bible scholar says, "According to Luke, Jesus is not guilty of the death of the animals. The demons made the proposal and thus carry the full responsibility." (François Bovon, *Luke 1*, 329-330.)

So do you see what is being communicated here? Do you see? You and I are no match for evil on our own. It's too sneaky and too powerful for us. But evil is not too powerful for God.

In Jesus, God allows evil to self-destruct like a stampede of pigs doing a swan-dive off a cliff into a lake.

In Jesus, God casts out evil with a decisiveness that sometimes frightens people, as it did those who found the demon-possessed man healed, clothed, and sitting in his right mind, a disciple of Jesus.

Jeff Paschal

In Jesus, the man came to know who he was—a beloved child of God. And in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we know God has and will defeat all evil forever.

So no matter what we evil we face—outside us or inside us-- whatever it is, we do not give up. When I am tempted to become discouraged, our Christian Educator, Kim Row, reminds me, “Just do your job.” She’s right. Our job is to participate in God’s kingdom that is coming. Sometimes we’ll succeed. Sometimes we’ll fail. But that kingdom is coming and it cannot be stopped. It is our joy and privilege to be a part of declaring it with what we say and do, by declaring this planet to be sacred, and every person to be precious.

Frank Rogers tells about something that happened a few years ago. He says, “As a professor of spirituality at a school of theology, I have the privilege of attending graduation ceremonies. I was at the commencement when Raul Monroe received his diploma. Raul was well known at our school. An openly gay man, he was graced with a religious tradition, the Metropolitan Community Church, that celebrated his identity and welcomed his ordination. Comfortable with his orientation,

Jeff Paschal

he founded the Gay and Lesbian Center on campus; he prepared for a ministry with the sexually marginalized; and, he befriended with disarming affability persons that spanned the entire theological spectrum. Our community treasured him, and we were proud to celebrate his courageous vocation.

“I was not so sure his father concurred. The moment I saw him, just before the ceremony, I felt a nauseous pity for Raul. His father wore dark jeans, a black leather biker jacket, and a gnarly beard that seemed to ooze from the skulled bandana that covered his head. But more, the man looked mean...huge, not obese...muscular, and seething with a defiant scowl like a barroom brawler...I could only imagine the terror a gay child endured in a house haunted by such a hulking presence. He followed, seemingly unamused, as Raul led his mother to the front row seats Raul had picked out for his parents. Once there, the father enthroned himself, then glared dead ahead as if thoroughly regretting this obligatory moment of formality.

Jeff Paschal

“The ceremony proceeded without incident. Names were read; diplomas were distributed; graduates filed by precisely as rehearsed. Nothing tipped off the outburst preparing to blow. The time came for Raul’s row to rise and approach the platform. Raul ascended the stairs. The dean trumpeted his name, ‘Raul Monroe.’ And with the volume of a mama bear’s roar and the glee of a school kid winning the Disneyland raffle, Raul’s father leapt from his chair with his fist outstretched and bellowed for the entire assembly to hear, ‘*That’s my boy!*’” (Frank Rogers, Jr. in *Weavings*, Nov/Dec 2015/2016, 43-44.)

We do not despair. We do not give up. We remember who we are. What’s your name? Not Legion, but beloved child of God. Christ shouts, that’s my boy; that’s my girl! Amen. ©Jeff Paschal