

**Pentecost 4 24th June 2007,  
Rev. Rob Lamerton**

Readings:

- 1 Kings 19:1-15a
- Psalm 42 & 43
- Galatians 3:10-14
- Luke 8:26-39

I can recall doing Jigsaw puzzles as a young boy! We would lay them out on card tables as they were being completed. Unfortunately card tables were notorious for instability and occasionally a beautiful picture just completed would disintegrate as a table was bumped and would collapse! Hundreds of pieces of every shape and colour!

Together — a wonderful picture!  
Apart — a jumble of disintegrated mess!  
Life is a bit like that for all of us!  
Sometimes every thing seems to go together!  
At other times everything falling apart!  
And for some a little more often than others like the man in our gospel story today!

Over the years I have encountered many people who have struggled with mental illness. Now I know that the story talks about "demons" suggesting some form of spiritual oppression but somehow there seems to be great difficulty drawing a line between the "mental" and the "spiritual". I also know that people with schizophrenia often refer to the voices they hear as "demonic".

Some people who have supportive families and relationships as well as wise and caring doctors find they can achieve a level of order and peace as well as integration in their lives. Many would be surprised to know they had a mental illness!

Then there are those who struggle! Those we find in the streets in Civic or calling at the Rectory for assistance. We

used to have our regular ones in country parishes who passed by every couple of months or so who lived rough but called in for a shower, a meal, a change of clothes and were on their way again!

They led disintegrated lives at a range of levels!

Disintegrated within themselves — fragile and broken.

Disintegrated within society and family.

For them, there are very few fragments, very few of the pieces which fit together.

The big issues of this week.... The concern over aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and the court case over the death of Mulrunji Doomadgee on Palm Island as symptomatic indicate not only the disintegration of a proud aboriginal culture but also indicating the level of disintegration of relationships between black and white Australians. I ask the question "How can we continue to get it wrong with the care and INTEGRATION into wider Australian society of Aboriginal people?" What is more important is the question "How do we get it right?"

Our own white / European society has dangerous levels of disintegration! The whole consumption and credit mentality; The decline of creativity; The lack of interest in a truly sacrificial approach in dealing with our energy needs as well as our inability to conserve water.

And I mention once again the sad division and disintegration of the Palestinian people.

There is so much disintegration of individuals, families and Communities around us!

In the gospel story today we hear of a man who has been so beset by demons that he has been banished from his normal life. He is so disintegrated I so totally "coming apart" in mind and in real life that he has to go and live among the dead — away from his friends and relatives! Life among the tombs indicated uncleanness — as for Jews places of death and burial were unclean — therefore cut off from God!

Once Jesus is able to name the demons — "Legion" (and of course a legion in Roman terms meant thousands of soldiers)?

Once he is able to name the enemy Jesus has power — how much more authority does a teacher have when a

troublesome student can be named.

So Jesus gives "permission" for the demons/unclean spirits to enter the pigs and they are destroyed by going [back] down into the abyss. According to the Book of Revelation the abyss is the place reserved for the enemies of God.

It is probably unhelpful to dwell on the fate of these poor pigs only to understand that like the tombs the pigs were also considered "unclean". The story does away with two lots of uncleanness.

The point is that this DIS integrated man of disintegrated existence begins here a new program of INTEGRATION — of being put back together!

It is the purpose of God for us all! That we move from where we are to becoming more together!

He is now sitting and the feet of Jesus "clothed and in his right mind" — there is a stillness and order about him and it is those round about who cannot cope...

With the man's new outlook;  
With what Jesus has done.

This is the great difficulty within society when individuals change;

The drug addict who gets clean;  
The alcoholic who stays sober;  
The reformed criminal;

The difficulty in accepting a changed person is because WE have to change to deal with him or her.

The man offers to go with Jesus but Jesus sends him away saying "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you". So! He goes off telling how much Jesus has done. Jesus however wants his rehabilitation completed. It is one thing for this man to be healed but Jesus knows he should be properly integrated and to take his place as a member of a family, community and society!

In that sense we are all like jigsaw pieces — all different shapes and colours looking to find our rightful place where we fit in!

And it is sometimes a tough call! Often we only find out the hard way like Elijah for whom God DID NOT speak in the

traditional way...  
In the great wind  
In the earthquake  
Or the fire

But quietly in the "sheer silence" sometimes called "the still small voice"

Even **then** it did not get easier as God confronts him:  
"What are you doing here Elijah?"

If we are not in our right place in the big jigsaw puzzle  
we will not fit  
And there is some  
Disintegration  
In ourselves  
In family  
In community

Like the man who had the demons Elijah is required to  
return to his normal place and do the job God has for him to  
do! And it is difficult!

Finally the letter of Paul to the Galatians reminds us that the  
real integration of people is about recognizing that we are all  
children of God through faith!

No division because of race or culture  
No division because of social class or standing  
No division because we are male or female

In Christ we look at each other with a view to seeing where  
we fit with God and with each other in God's big picture  
puzzle. God calls the church to be a sample of an integrated  
human family.

In all the situations mentioned earlier (Aboriginal Issues,  
Mental Health), we might remember Jesus' ministry to the  
man — undaunted by the complexity and fearsome  
appearance and location?  
— he hangs in there with the man  
— he doesn't give the man the easy way out — to follow —  
but puts him back where he belongs to find his place in  
God's bigger puzzle.

