

“Rogue and Uncaged”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

~o~

Jesus and his pals just couldn't seem to catch a break! They'd just reunited after the disciple's mission to the Judean countryside and were eager to swap stories and get some much-needed rest and relaxation. Jesus suggested that they head to a deserted place, but as they neared the spot, the masses emerged and Jesus returned to teaching and healing. No rest for the weary!

We'll come back to Jesus in a few moments, but first, there are a couple of things I'd like to point out in the reading Rodger shared with us a few

moments ago. Here we learn of King David's intention to build a house for God. Apparently, the king was feeling guilty about leaving The Ark of the Covenant outside in a tent while he enjoyed the good life in the palace. It's likely strange for us to think of building a literal house for the divine to dwell in. While we sometimes refer to our churches as "God's house," I'm guessing that few of us really think that the Holy actually "lives" here the way we live in *our* homes. The ancient Israelites, on the other hand, believed that God's very presence dwelt with the Ark.

As we learned last week, the Ark of the Covenant was a gold box that had been built according to the detailed instructions transmitted to Moses. It held the tablets of the law and was kept in a special tent called the Tabernacle. Now that the Israelites were settled in the land of Palestine, the monarchy was firmly in place, and David ruled from the palace in his new capital of Jerusalem, he thought it was high time that God had a proper house too. God disagreed. "Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day[!]"

David wanted to build God a house. But God wasn't having it. You see, the trouble with timbers and brick and mortar is that they're not very portable. In fact, structures made of these materials aren't intended to be moved at all. They're permanent. They allow us to "nest" – to fill them up with stuff – practical and comfortable and sentimental objects that give us a sense of stability, and place, and home, and safety. Apparently, the divine just wasn't ready to be enshrined in a sparkling temple, to be "kept" in a gilded cage – not yet anyway. The Hebrew Bible reports that God eventually allowed David's son, Solomon, to build a temple, but truly, the Holy One of the Cosmos would never be domesticated – confined within its walls.

If there's one thing that the Jesus of Mark's gospel would teach us, it's that the kingdom of heaven is near – is breaking into the nitty gritty, blood and sweat, poor and sick and hungry world of every-day people. The Holy couldn't be confined to a human-made, albeit gilded and glittering temple. No, the true dwelling place of the Divine is among us.

Everywhere he went, Jesus revealed the Divine Presence in preaching and teaching, healing and miracles, feeding and forgiving. This presence was not limited to or contained in some far-away temple. It was everywhere, with everyone, in everything – even in the lived realities of those who felt most distanced, cut-off, even abandoned. That was the good news Jesus made it his mission to share.

How often, I wonder, do we fall in with David, seeking to enshrine our beliefs and experiences of the divine in golden temples? How often do we try and tame or house-break the Holy to fit neatly into the hour on Sunday we carve out, in the building built especially for us to gather in, in the approved and expected ways: communion, baptism, sacred music, readings from a holy book, and prepared prayers and preaching.

The truth is, good as these things are, they can become prisons for containing the Holy instead of vehicles through which we experience it. We think we know where to look, but it simply refuses to be contained, boxed in, or domesticated. The world is God's temple and the example of Jesus' life and ministry remind us that this temple has no doors, no walls. The true dwelling place of the Divine is among us.

In the Gospel of Thomas, a non-canonical gospel written around or before the time of the gospels contained in our Bibles, Jesus states: "Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find Me there." The Holy isn't contained in any of the glittering temples or gilded cages we construct for it – it may be found there, but it's not captive to those places. And that's good news for us for at least two reasons.

Firstly, our conceptions and experiences of the Holy are just that – ours. When we make our conceptions and experiences of the Divine into universal standards or all-encompassing creeds, we are constructing yet another gilded cage for the Holy – something that can never be fully contained in our individual beliefs or experiences, nor in our religious identities, political parties, racial categories, or localized affinities. Thank God, the Holy is bigger than all that!

Secondly, because the Divine isn't contained by any of the glittering temples of our making, that means it's free to move about the nitty gritty,

blood and sweat, poor and sick and hungry world of every-day people, bringing hope and healing, life and meaning, wisdom and wholeness to all. After all, the true dwelling place of the Divine is among us.

I realize that this sermon has been a bit cerebral and theological—no funny jokes or heart-warming stories. I've omitted those intentionally. This week, I really want us to be open to seeing and hearing and experiencing the Divine in unexpected places. I really want us to open up any cages or temples that we've constructed to contain our beliefs about or our experiences of the Divine. I really want us to see the Holy in others, to experience its wisdom and peace and healing and wholeness coming from an unexpected source or in an unexpected way. I really want us *to find* and *to be* the illustrations I omitted from this sermon. And if you do experience the Holy in an unexpected person or in an unexpected way, I'd love to hear about it.

As you go into this week, remember, the Holy is not limited to the temples we build – to the places or beliefs or experiences we hold dear. Only we are limited by those things. God has gone rogue. Where will we experience that Divine, this week? May our hearts be open as we go forth to find out. Amen.