**6-23-19**

**No Oher gods Before Him**

**By Rev. Sheryl Stewart**

Isaiah 65: 1-12 Galatians 3: 23-29 Luke 8: 26-39

RR: Psalm 42

**Summary: Our God is that in which we trust and turn to for guidance, self-understanding, and hope. There are still many idols in our world, but only one Voice is the Living God.**

The last time I led worship, I spoke about how the popular concept of Karma, although it can apply to our lives, is not something we can depend on. As I reflected on the lectionary for this week, it came to me that Karma might just be one of the modern names for a very old false god, namely Destiny. We do not plant groves or hold feasts for Destiny today, but a lot of people guide their lives by their horoscopes, play with Ouija boards, or look to Karma to redeem them.

Fortune was another idol Israel looked to instead of to the God who kept calling out, “Here am I; here am I.” Fortune or Luck still guides people’s lives under names like Numerology, Fung Shui, or “Right Use of Will.” If you think this is not worship, how many gamblers have whispered a prayer to their dice, claiming that their “Baby needs a new pair of shoes?”

Then, there is Science and logic, handy tools which many look to with far more trust than they place in Jesus. Related to science are the endless tests in popular magazines which claim to reveal some essential traits by which we may come to know ourselves and the way we relate to others. This is not all fluff, either; there are many such introspective systems which are used by many employers, including the church, to help decode the dynamics of leadership.

The Bible teaches that there are other choices than God, powers and principalities which are very real. It is not pagan to admit such choices are real, but we are to put none of them before God.

Paul remarks that even the Law, our respected tutor and a gift from God, could not justify us. The law leads us to see that we cannot justify ourselves. So, if we keep trusting in obedience to the law, which is there to show us that we fall short, then the Law itself becomes a false god from whose prison we need to be set free. We can be justified only by faith.

The madman of the Gergesenes was tormented, led, and driven by a demonic legion which acted as his gods. When the true Son of God stands before him, the terrified false gods of his mental and spiritual illness beg to invade the unclean pigs. When they escape to the swine, the result is a suicidal death of the livestock, which terrifies everyone on the island.

Begged by the crowd to leave, Jesus, their hope, prepares to go. They prefer their own failed policy of chaining and confining the insane. This would probably be the time to remind you that I was a correctional facility nurse for 20 years – 12 in Attica and 5 in Albion. A good 90% of people who have lived in psychiatric hospitals, once discharged to the community, end up in prison.

The former Gergesene lunatic begs to leave with Jesus. I would have asked the same thing. Jesus sends the man back to be a witness, an apostle and evangelist among his own people. We, also, live in communities where priorities can involve multiple false gods. We gather weekly in this community of faith to renew our faith, but Jesus sends us back out there to share what is being done by the Living God.

Our God is that in which we trust and turn to for guidance, self-understanding, and hope. There are still many idols in our world, but only one Voice is the Living God. Jesus is asked by many to go away, but He sends us in His place. As for us, and our house, we will follow the God who is God.