

Monday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 20, 2023

Recommended readings: p. 238, "January 1, 1863," pp. 239-242, "The Camp," pp. 250-257, "Self-Defense" (part 1)

In chapter nine, Carol Anderson writes about the unjust enforcement of self-defense laws. "The Second Amendment, ratified in 1791, codified for white citizens the right to bear arms and to protect themselves. If there were any doubts about who these rights pertained to, they were put to rest in 1800, when Virginia governor James Monroe called out several regiments of the state's militia to thwart, before it could begin, a widespread revolt planned by an enslaved man named Gabriel, and then to hunt him and the other participants down.... The response was to double down and make more explicit through legislation the prohibitions on Black people owning guns. One Virginian wrote in the local newspaper that 'we must re-enact all those rigorous laws which experience has proved necessary to keep [slavery] within bounds. In a word, if we will keep a ferocious monster in our country, we must keep him in chains.'"

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"— for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) ...Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. (Luke 8:26-29, 33)

"If we will keep a ferocious monster in our country, we must keep him in chains." Words written by a white Virginian in his local newspaper soon after the ratification of the Second Amendment. The monster he referred to was slavery. Chains were deemed essential to enshrine and control the "right" to keep people and make them serve against their will. But this wasn't the first time chains were necessary to keep evil from escaping. When Jesus came upon the man from the Gerasenes who was troubled, instead of seeing a threat to be controlled, he saw a human being wrongfully afflicted, not just by his mental disturbances, but also by the chains that held him in place. And instead of fearing the man, Jesus had compassion on him and freed him from his inner demons, which allowed him to also be freed from the literal chains that held him.

Prayer

God of freedom, we repent of the ways that we have chained our brothers and sisters, literally and figuratively. Please free us from the fear that makes us think chains are necessary, so we can see all people as you do. Amen.