

GRACE CHURCH  
PENTECOST 2 (Proper 7-C RCL, track one)

Honesdale, PA  
22-23 June 2019

1 Kings 19: 1-4 (5-7) 8-15a  
Psalm 42  
Galatians 3: 23-29  
Luke 8: 26-39

*CAUGHT*  
+ + +

Jeremy was caught -  
    caught in a net of society, of bad family situations,  
        caught by his demons of weakness and hopelessness  
            which he considered helplessness.  
Caught in a web by a society that didn't approve of things he had done.  
    and caught once again by the law of the land,  
        spiraling further and further into darkness.  
Jeremy was caught by a legion of demons.  
Caught and thrown into a "Correctional" Institution.  
"Correction" - what a euphemism!  
The authorities of society believed it would be better for him.  
He might, like some, learn a trade while kept off the street  
    and influences which fought against and within him.  
He might, like some, learn discipline, boundaries,  
    which he had never been taught by his family, teachers or friends.  
He might even find hope,  
    though he would have to work at it,  
        if he wanted to,  
            if he was able to.  
Hopelessness.  
For the rest of his life, there was no hope.  
He was caught.  
Hopeless.  
Until,  
    until Mary entered the home.  
They call it a 'home' but it was really another form of prison.  
Over the course of several weeks,  
    Mary decided to bring someone with her,  
        someone she wanted Jeremy to meet.  
After knowing something of Jeremy,  
    she had talked with the authorities and selected Jeremy,  
        along with a couple of other guys,  
            to be part of a new program.  
He was chosen - by someone - someone who cared.  
Mary brought someone to the home to meet Jeremy.  
His name was Bruiser - a good name for him and for Jeremy.  
They had something in common: they were both bruised.

Mary introduced Bruiser and Jeremy to each other tentatively,  
neither was too sure of the other.  
Bruiser had just come from a place like this himself  
and was likewise skeptical of relationships.  
Bruiser had been selected, too, from the shelter,  
another euphemism.  
And Jeremy had never had a dog before.  
Bruiser, an older dog, with no future except possible euthanasia -  
as no one seemed to want him.  
No one had deemed him worthy of adoption.  
How long would he live?  
He'd been abused and abandoned, and had relationship issues.  
Didn't like people much, who could blame him  
and there were potential medical costs which no one wanted,  
and he was just plain ugly, beat up and ragged.  
No one deemed him worthy.  
Except Mary.  
So dog looked at human, and man looked at canine.  
The misfits were made for each other.  
And demons began to dissipate into the abyss.  
We can't any of us be Jesus,  
but we can be Jesus' workers.

Mary established a local program that took animals from the shelter  
and matched them with inmates  
with the hope of rehabilitating both,  
and showing each the possibility of unconditional love.  
With time, with love, with needing someone else,  
both human and animal were given a positive sense of self-worth.  
Mary was a convincing advocate,  
and the authorities skeptical decided it was worth a try.  
Jeremy wasn't so sure,  
and neither was Bruiser.  
Youth looked at dog, and yet dog didn't look back, at first.  
It was not easy for either of them.  
But in a week or two, both Jeremy and Bruiser began to trust each other.  
I insist that animals and human animals learn trust through habit.  
How one is treated becomes a habit and a trust.  
After several weeks, Jeremy was allowed to keep Bruiser overnight.  
And Bruiser discovered how comfortable Jeremy's bed was and warm.  
As big a Bruiser was, Jeremy discovered that he could just fit, too,  
and to fight the dog for the blanket.  
It became a game they both came to enjoy -  
the tug of war, the tug of love.  
Mary returned months later to discover two mates  
who could not be separated.

She sat in Jeremy's chair and watched as Bruiser sat content  
with his head on Jeremy's leg  
as the young man unconsciously stroked the dog's ears.  
An unwanted, unloved, cast-off sitting lovingly,  
as the cadence of human voice and petting lulled into peacefulness.  
And a youth who knew no responsibility, no good habits,  
who himself knew only abuse and mistreatment  
suddenly transformed into a caring and trustworthy companion.  
The demons of both man and dog were exorcized,  
cast out by the healing power of love for another.  
The unloved was now loved.

The man who suffered from demons in Luke's Gospel story today  
was healed by the power of being loved by someone Other.  
And following the encounter with Christ's supreme love,  
desired nothing more than to sit at his Master's feet.  
Healed, loved, and loving unconditionally.

So back to Mary.  
We cannot be Jesus,  
but like Mary, we can be Jesus' workers.  
And sometimes, it's the simplest way of thinking creatively  
working diligently,  
and not giving up  
when you know you can heal someone -  
like Jeremy,  
like Bruiser.  
One of my favorite hymns ends,  
"and a glad sound comes with the setting sun,  
'Servant, well done.'"  
AMEN.

