

In Sharing What God has Done for Us The Way to Cope In a “Legion” Infected World

Jesus said, “What is your name?” He replied, “Legion”.

Hi.

My name is Susan. I am ordained to the Episcopal Order of Vocational Deacons, and I serve the parish of St. Barnabas, here in Arroyo Grande, under the direction of the bishop of El Camino Real. What exactly does that mean?

From the Episcopal Dictionary:

“A deacon serves directly under and at the direction of a bishop and is charged to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world and then help animate the peoples' response; to lead church members in service to the poor, needy and oppressed.”

What is the difference between me and Fr. Rob? Simply put, he, as a priest gathers the faithful (that’s you) for worship and to build up your faith. Then I, as the deacon, lead you back out into the world for service.

For me this includes preaching regarding the needs of the world and talking about how we, as God’s people, followers of his son Jesus, respond to those needs.

With that in mind, heavy sigh.

“Legion” has infected our world and most especially our country. It reminds me of the song from way back in 1983 sung by Anne Murray:

*“Just once how I'd like to see the headline say
"Not much to print today, can't find nothin' bad to say", because
Nobody robbed a liquor store on the lower part of town
Nobody OD'ed, nobody burned a single buildin' down
Nobody fired a shot in anger, nobody had to die in vain
We sure could use a little good news today*

We are presented daily with so many, many problems that it is overwhelming. It seems uncopable. And part of what we are hearing about are those who could not find a way to cope. Most of it is far away from our

cozy home here on the Central Coast of California. But even here, it is hard to know how to fix our own back yard problems. We are not immune to the climate issues, pollution, fires, the hungry, the homeless, eldercare, childcare, gas prices—which, by the way, California has the highest prices in the nation, and we have the highest prices in the state. It's all here. And yes, we have even experienced gun violence and racially motivated hate crimes.

- Recently, a man who helped in committing the murder of an Arroyo Grande teenage girl back in 1995 was granted parole.
- In 2005 a gunman shot and killed 2 people and injured 1 in Denny's in Pismo Beach.
- In March and April of 2011 two incidents of racially motivated crimes were committed—one burned the cross that was used in Jesus Christ Superstar on the lawn of a person of color
- The homeless population in SLO County is around 1,500 but California has the highest rate of homelessness in the country with over 150,000.

I received an email just a few days ago from the 5 Cities Homeless Coalition asking for comment on the county's homeless plan and I am inviting you to go to the SLO county website and to look at that plan and they would like to have comments by June 30th.

[https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Social-Services/Homeless-Services/Homeless-Services-Oversight-Council-\(HSOC\).asp](https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Social-Services/Homeless-Services/Homeless-Services-Oversight-Council-(HSOC).asp)

- The need for foster care is ongoing in our county. According to the DSS we have 350 youths in foster care at any given time.
- San Luis Obispo County has the highest suicide rate in the state at 17.1 per 100K deaths compared to the state average of 10.4 as of a report in 2019.

And the list of local needs goes on and on. Yes. Heavy sigh.

Is there? Can there be? Any relief?

Remember the song "*Put your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee*"?

My favorite verse is:

*Every time I look into the Holy Book I want to tremble,
Or when I read about the part where the carpenter cleared the temple,
For the buyers and the sellers were no different fellas than what I*

profess to be

And it causes me shame to know we're not the people we should be

In that Holy Book, in that Holy Book, our scripture readings today tell us, “yes”, there is hope. There is relief. We just have to trust in God’s redeeming love...and do something.

The man possessed by Legion was so happy to be freed from the demons he wanted to stay with Jesus.

“...but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.”

I’m kind of like that man. It is hard to get out in the world. I once told the rector of St. Peter’s in Morro Bay back in 2003 that I could live in the church because it felt safe. But Jesus was symbolically wagging his finger at me and pointing me outside.

Several times a year we promise, out loud during our worship service, to “go outside” when we reaffirm our baptismal covenant. We promise to share Jesus’s love and concern. This does not mean all we have to do is stand on a street corner with a sign that says, “Jesus loves you”. It means, we show appreciation for God’s love by sharing that love. We are not to hide it under the proverbial “bushel basket”—staying cozy in the church or in our homes.

We do have struggles in this place that Oprah Winfrey once called the happiest place. But we also have caring people who have developed agencies that we can support with our time and other resources. The Saint Barnabas Thrift Store is one of the ways you, as faithful followers of Jesus help to support other agencies. But the Thrift store doesn’t run itself. Volunteers are what make it successful. There is always a need for volunteers. Wouldn’t it be fabulous if there were so many volunteers there weren’t enough slots for everyone?! Are you able? Can you volunteer? If you can, ask MaryAnn Hjalmarson about it.

I love to hear about the experiences we have when we open ourselves to service. God’s love just gushes out all over so much so that we find we are able to cope with the Legion of troubles around us.

Sometimes service comes to us in the most unexpected ways. I recently got a call from a number I did not recognize so I didn’t answer it. Like you, I figure that if they really want to talk to me, they will leave a message.

(Although I'm hoping they won't) No message was left. But lately I have been dealing with a lot of companies with area codes from all over the place. So, I decided to call the number back. I had the most wonderful conversation with a 93-year-old woman in Texas. My number she called by mistake. Our conversation led her to tell me I was an angel sent to her that day.

I also had the recent experience of helping with the Aids Life Cycle fund raiser which reached almost \$18 million just this year. Aids is still real. In 2019 there were nearly 37,000 new cases diagnosed in the U.S.A. alone. Fr. Ian from St. Stephen's in San Luis Obispo and Laura Learned who is the Senior Warden at St. James' in Paso Robles joined me in San Miguel as we greeted cyclers into SLO County. They were so grateful for our support—and most especially for the cool water spritzing as they rode by. Many said we were “road angels.” All these small gifts of our time, our hearts, and our resources add up.

There are more ways to “tell about what God has done for us” than I can reasonably list. We fortify our faith through our worship, our prayers, and our fellowship so that we are pumped up; ready to share with those who are needy in whatever way Jesus calls us. Sometimes it is overwhelming. Sometimes it hurts—a lot. Sometimes we lose sleep. That is a human thing to do and yet, we are promised that God is with us and will give us courage and strength. God does that through the Holy Spirit, tapping us—each one—to reach out our hand; sharing what God has done for us through that immeasurable love which Jesus demonstrated time and again in his ministry.

As you ponder all that God has done for you and how you can tell it, here is one more little lyric from a man named Bing:

*When I'm worried and I can't sleep
I count my blessings instead of sheep
And I fall asleep counting my blessings*