

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“MY NAME IS LEGION”  
John 14:15-21  
April 27, 2008  
8:45 & 11:00 A.M. Services**

The poem *My Name Is Legion* begins, “**Within my earthly temple there’s a crowd; / There’s one of us that’s humble, one that’s proud, / there’s one that’s broken-hearted for his sins, / there’s one that unrepentant sits and grins.**” Each of us, however, can exercise “**crowd**” control, and can invite Jesus into the center of our lives.

Charles Dickens asked himself, “What faces are the most distinct to me in the fleeting crowd?” He answered, “Lo, these.” Then he named Peggotty, Little Emily, Pickwick, Micawber, Sam Weller, Oliver Twist, Tiny Tim, and Agnes. All these lived in Dickens before they lived in his stories. Who lives in you?

**Identifying the crowd within.**

More people live in each of us than we know. We are like a bus full of people, which we are driving. In the seats behind us are our family members, old classmates and roommates, former instructors and coaches and supervisors. Everything is fine as long as we are driving, but these passengers can distract us or reach for the steering wheel. You have probably watched the child of a friend and thought, “**I can really see her mother in her!**” In the middle years many people are shocked when a photograph reveals them bearing a striking similarity to one of their parents, or when they hear themselves sounding like Mom or Dad. Our parents live in us, and this is good news for some, but bad news for others.

Using another image, some suggest that we are like haunted houses, filled with the spirits of all those who have influenced and shaped us - - for better or worse. Perhaps a memorable teacher lives in you, someone who opened your eyes to new vistas or stirred your mind with new ideas. Maybe some stern taskmaster from your past lives in you, continuing to harp on your imperfections, still whittling away at your self-esteem. Some of our childhood heroes live in us forever, as do the bullies who made our childhoods miserable. Do you remember the man whose demons were sent by Jesus into a herd of swine? When Jesus asked the man his name, he said, *“My name is Legion; for we are many.”* (Mk 5) Who lives in you?

### **Deciding who goes and who stays.**

Self-discovery involves deciding who you wish to continue living in you and who you would like to evict. Bringing a sense of order to the inner life requires negotiating a truce with some of those who still terrorize your depths. If we would grow toward maturity we must appeal, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, to **“the better angels of our nature.”** The good news is that, by virtue of the gift of freedom, we have some choice over who lives within us, at least who will be our honored guests. An English schoolmaster, who taught wriggling, giggling boys all day long, carved over his humble cottage the inscription, **“Dante, Shakespeare, and Yeats Live Here.”**

Often there is a dominant resident within us, a person who has such extraordinary influence on us that it is difficult to say where the line of separation is between such a person and ourselves. A tribal chieftain was killed by a raiding party from an enemy tribe. The mantle of leadership was passed on to the chieftain’s young son. When it was time for him to address the members of his tribe, he was almost overcome with self-consciousness and feelings of inadequacy. After some awkward moments, however, he seemed to gain strength and confidence. He proceeded to deliver a powerful speech to his people, stirring their tribal pride and inspiring new hopes for their future. Later, one of the elders of the tribe asked the boy where his powerful words came from. The boy said, **“As I stood there wondering what to say, suddenly I felt my father stand up inside of me. He took over my body and my voice. The words you heard were not from me but from my father.”**

The poet Tennyson wrote the lovely poem *Crossing the Bar* in only a few minutes. It flashed into his mind complete, and left him with the feeling that he had not written it, but only transcribed it. Who can say with certainty what comes from oneself and what comes through oneself from another? Jesus was so utterly transparent that his words and deeds were pure reflections of his Father in heaven.

### **Christ in us, the hope of glory.**

Jesus, in our scripture this morning, is preparing his disciples for the time just ahead when he will no longer be with them physically. Among his words are references to what some have called “**Christ mysticism.**” He says, for example, that the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, that is coming “*will be in you.*” (Jn 14:17) He says, “*You will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.*” (Jn 14:20) The Apostle Paul wrote and spoke repeatedly in these same terms. He understood that he was *in Christ* and that Christ was *in him*. For Paul this was the essence of what it means to be a Christian: Christ is invited to become the predominant person living within us. “*Christ in you,*” he wrote in Colossians, “*the hope of glory.*” (1:27)

We unnecessarily complicate these teachings if we understand them to refer to some kind paranormal, esoteric phenomenon. Such may be the experience of some, but not necessarily of all. The simple point is that when Christ is invited to live in us, and when he is made the predominant person in our lives, the evidence of our union with Christ is seen in our daily lives. God is working in us “*both to will and to do his good pleasure.*” (Ph 2:13) *Christ in us* is indeed our hope of true glory.

John the Baptist said of Jesus, “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*” (Jn 3:30) Those in whom Christ lives most fully are largely unaware that others see Christ in them. They most assuredly never need to speak of it! Rod McKuen said somewhere that words are only necessary when love is gone. When the beauty of Christ is reflected in us, it speaks more effectively than the most eloquent words.

Karl Barth was lecturing to a group of students at Princeton. One student asked “**Sir, don't you think that God has revealed himself in other religions and not only in Christianity?**” Barth's answer stunned the crowd. With a modest thunder he answered, “**No, God has not revealed**

**himself in any religion, including Christianity. He has revealed himself in his Son.”**

Eric Clapton wrote a heart wrenching song about the death of his four year old son. He fell from a 53rd-story window. Clapton took nine months off and when he returned his music had changed. **(By the way, he is arguably the greatest living rock guitarist.)** The hardship had made his music softer, more powerful, and more reflective. You have perhaps heard the song he wrote about his son's death. It is a song of hope:

**Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven?  
 Would it be the same if I saw you in heaven?  
 I must be strong and carry on,  
 'Cause I know I don't belong here in heaven.**

**Would you hold my hand if I saw you in heaven?  
 Would you help me stand if I saw you in heaven?  
 I'll find my way through night and day,  
 'Cause I know I just can't stay here in heaven.**

**Time can bring you down, time can bend your knees.  
 Time can break your heart, have you begging please, begging please.  
 Beyond the door there's peace I'm sure,  
 And I know there'll be no more tears in heaven.**

I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be the church to help you let Christ live in you.