



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
**in the City of New York**  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, January 27, 2019**  
*The Third Sunday After the Epiphany*

*Festal Evensong*  
*at 4:00 p.m.*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, *Rector*

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### **You have to face your demons in order to see the bigger picture.**

I find the idea of demonic possession troubling. Not because I don't believe in demons or evil in our world but because of the way it can be distorted and used against people – even in our world today – and as it was used against Jesus himself: *“Then they brought to him a demoniac who was blind and mute; and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see. All the crowds were amazed and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons.”* (Matthew 12:22-24)

That poor man could now see and speak and claim his rightful place within the community but the Pharisees were not interested in that at all; the Pharisees couldn't see the bigger picture.

The bible was written in ages where science and medicine were so un-developed compared to today. Very few of us presenting ourselves with a mental disorder or even a chronic disease at our GP surgery would expect to be told it was because of the result of sin or, worse, demonic possession. At the time of Jesus, things were very different; Jesus lived in an age where facts and values were inseparable. The answer to a question such as “Why is the sky blue?” would say as much about the goodness of a creator God as it would about how the blue color came about. The same would be true to the question “Why am I ill?”. Today we live in an age that separates facts and values. The sky is blue because of the particles refracting light in the atmosphere and people get sick because their bodies are invaded by a virus. All this seems a long way from demonic possession and yet, in a world that does not examine things through the religious lens many people still use terms such as evil to describe what is wrong in our world or our society or even our bodies.

And then there are our personal demons – not necessarily supernatural ones - but ones far closer to home and, potentially, far more damaging. Sometimes we allow something to have so much hold over our lives that the balance of power is disturbed; alcohol, gambling, drugs, sex...these can become obsessive or even addictions. But there are other demons that many face very silently: The bitterness of a relationship that has turned cold; the remembrance of a tragedy in the past; the memory of a hurt that has become twisted and torturous. It is beautifully expressed in that poignant phrase from the confession during the Eucharist in the Book of Common Prayer: *“the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable.”*

Casting out demons is something Jesus did but, perhaps, the casting out is less about the existence of devils and evil spirits and more about getting the balance of our lives right. Do you remember the young man who wanted to follow Jesus and who had followed the commandments and was faithful to them? (Mark 10:17-22). Jesus looked at him and the gospel says “he *loved* him.” But, when he told him that he lacked only one thing – that he should sell all his possessions and give it to the poor, the young man went away shocked and

sad because his wealth had become an obsession for him. One of the saddest things I ever find myself dealing with as a priest is meeting people who have carried a burden not of their own making that has weighed them down and which they think has made them ugly in God's sight. One of the greatest joys is to be able to minister some of the joy of Jesus Christ in relieving that person of that burden; helping them to realize that they are loved and that they are made in God's image.

Many times in the gospels we hear of how Jesus looked intently at people with a gaze that reached deep inside the hidden and dark places of their lives. Jesus sees more than what is on the surface and helps us to become whole by accepting that we are loved by God for who we are rather than in spite of who we are. The ministry of Jesus Christ is to help us see the *bigger picture* and how our lives are forever changing and growing as we become more perfect images of God our creator. As St Therese of Lisieux contemplated, *"God does not choose the people worthy of the calling; no, he chooses the people it pleases him to choose."*

Last year, the Metropolitan Museum of Art held a retrospective exhibition of the works of British artist, David Hockney, to celebrate his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Some years before, the Royal Academy of Art in London held an exhibition of some of his recent works. It was called "A Bigger Picture" and it was a remarkable exhibition of some large scale works painted over the past few years since Hockney had returned to his native Yorkshire after living in California for a very long time; what was fantastic for me, and may be utterly puzzling to you, is that these are paintings of *East* Yorkshire – the bit of Yorkshire that has my home town Hull in it - which is the city that people are embarrassed to say that they are from. Hockney had become besotted with parts of the landscape only a few miles from where I grew up. Some of his canvases are huge; multiple panels filling whole walls – filled with color and vibrancy. There was even a massive room filled with prints of studies made on his iPad and taking you through the seasons of the year and ending with his largest painting with 32 large panels. If you stood in that room in the middle, you could turn in a circle and take in the changing seasons in just a few moments. It was, quite literally, breath-taking and something I have never experienced before. However, there was something even more intimate that was even more remarkable. In one small room, there was a film playing, but it was no ordinary film. In a rather eccentric way, Hockney had set up 9 high definition cameras on a rusty old truck and had it roll up and down a lane over and over again as the seasons changed. The resulting footage, shown on 18 high definition screens, was amazing; for half an hour you were mesmerized. And the most powerful thing was that this "bigger picture" was not just about the size of the works. In fact, one might mistakenly think that the bigger the picture the less detail there must be – rather like the bigger you blow up a photograph on a computer screen, the less definition it has. No, for Hockney a bigger picture is to get really close and discover the detail – every blade of grass – every petal – every changing moment – every shadow. He describes it like the human eye, unable to take everything in and, therefore, scanning constantly and building the bigger picture. Hockney says *"Film cameramen have always said it is difficult to film the tallness of trees – or for that matter the tallness of anything because to show it all you have to be too far away. Put three cameras one above the other and you can be a lot closer and the grandeur of the tree can become a subject; you feel more connected with what you're looking at."*

You feel more connected with what you are looking at.

The ministry of Jesus Christ is exactly that – utter inter-connectedness and a bigger picture that is the most detailed that one could ever imagine. Discovering the bigger picture and allowing that to be at the heart of our spiritual journey is why Jesus came. So that brings us back to the beginning and the casting out of demons; perhaps it is less to do with spiritual warfare but everything to do with Jesus seeing the bigger picture and allowing *him* to become part of it in my life. Or, as the Collect of the day puts it:

*Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works.*