

Luke 8:26-39

²⁶Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷As 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.

²⁸When 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”— ²⁹for 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.) ³⁰Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. ³¹They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. ³²Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³Then 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. ³⁴When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. ³⁶Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed.

³⁷Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Sermon – June 19, 2016

“they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind”

Today I am going to talk to you about the transformation Christ offers all of us. In our Gospel a man filled with demons was transformed.

I think Christ's great love for the demoniac in today's Gospel is what cured him. The deranged man came smack right up against the great love of Jesus which knew him in his pain and this cured him. Jesus' power was the power of love. He was able to recognize the man as having worth and to overpower the wars going on within the man possessed.

We don't really understand very well about demons today, do we? That is not so important as understanding that Jesus healed the man. Jesus wanted to know the man's name. When asked that question, the man was able to retrieve the memory not only of his name, but he was able to remember who he was. And who was he? He was a child of God whose only desire was to sit at Jesus' feet and to follow him and to proclaim what Jesus had done for him. Meeting face-to-face God's love in Jesus brought calm and sanity, but also purpose to this crazy man.

So it can be with us too. All our confusion, anxiety, tiredness and hurt can be smoothed away if we meet God's love in Jesus face-to-face. That false self that pursues acceptance, power and friends can fall away, if we are willing to meet God.

Here is a little story: Fred Craddock, a famous preacher, tells of a young woman in a small town who had a job cleaning the old hotel. There were not many customers anymore and she was the only cleaning person there. Part of her pay was that she got a room in the attic of the old place. She came down every morning with a bucket and a mop, an old dress and old shoes and cleaned. The hotel had a beautiful entry with a marble floor, a nice chandelier, and fine woodwork. Every day, she scrubbed and polished them all. Every night she went up to that little room with her mop, her bucket, in the same old dress and same old shoes. In the morning she got up and put the same thing on and got that old bucket and came downstairs to clean. Same old, same old. Sometimes her boss yelled at her, “Hurry up! Go clean Room 33. What's wrong with you?” Sometimes when she was down on her hands and knees cleaning the marble floor people yelled in the front door and made fun of her.”

One day as she was in the lobby cleaning, a man walked in and said, “Pardon me, Miss but I’m a stranger in town and I’m looking for 420 Oak Street. Could you help me?” She just stared at him. No one had been courteous to her for a long time. He continued, “I hate to interrupt you. My, this place is beautiful. It just shines! I know your boss must be proud of your work. Do you do this all by yourself?” She just stood there with her mouth open. He went on to say, “My, that chandelier! Crystal. How do you keep it so sparkling clean? This really is marvelous work you are doing here.” She just continued to look at him. She couldn’t believe anyone was talking to her that way.

That night as she went up to the little room with her mop and bucket and old dress and old shoes, she went over to the mirror and looked at herself. She pulled the rag off her head and shook her hair and said, “I think I’ll do my hair tonight.” She went over to a cardboard closet and said, “I think I’ll wear this outfit tomorrow. I think I’ll wear some different shoes. She picked up a bottle of perfume and said, “I think I’ll wear this tomorrow.” (Craddock)

What has happened to her? I think in the light of the gospel lesson, we might say she had been living among the tombs and had been healed. She was changed. She is a different person. We all long to be healed like that. We all long to be changed. We want to know in our hearts, at our very centre, that we are precious to God, that we are beloved. We want to be freed from the fear that drives us to avoid rejection, humiliation and abandonment. These experiences yield truth, and scripture says, “You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.”(John 8:34)

So what are we to do? We hear and receive the wonderful story of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac. We hold onto the image of the man, once naked and agitated, sitting clothed and in his right mind at the feet of Jesus. We are left with the image of this man proclaiming in his homeland, how much Jesus had done for him.

If we long for that transformation, what do we do? Part of the answer is found in the Old Testament reading we had this morning from 1 Kings. Elijah went up on Mount Horab, searching for his Lord. He was told to wait, for the Lord was about to pass by. The Lord was **not** in the great wind that split mountains and broke rocks. The Lord was **not** in the earthquake which came after the wind. The Lord was **not** in the fire. But it was in the ‘**sound of sheer silence**’ that Elijah heard the voice of the Lord as he stood at the entrance of the cave.

And so, I suggest that it will be the same for us. If we truly wish to be changed, if we wish to feel the touch of our Lord, then it is best we sit out a bit from the noise of the world. Elijah went up a mountain. We can turn off the radio and the tv, the computer, the phone. Then, if we can sit for even a few moments, read a bit of scripture and think on it and pray on it; it is then that we may begin to hear the 'still small voice' that is our Lord. We may begin to be healed. We may begin to grasp the healing truth, that we are loved by a Lord who sees value in each of us, just as we are. We may take in deeply the truth that we are loved by Christ because he understands our pain. For Christ was rejected, abandoned and shamed too.

Let us hold onto the image of the healed demoniac sitting at Christ's knee, and in the stillness, come to know the transforming love which loves us even in our disarray. Amen.