



GO HOME!!! – Touchpoint for June 15, 2022

Luke 8:26-39 (The Message and NRSVUE) They sailed on to the country of the Gerasenes, directly opposite Galilee. As he stepped out onto land, a madman from town met him; he was a victim of demons. He hadn't worn clothes for a long time, nor lived at home; he lived in the cemetery. When he saw Jesus he screamed, fell before him, and howled, "What business do you have messing with me? You're Jesus, Son of the High God, but don't give me a hard time!" (The man said this because Jesus had started to order the unclean spirit out of him.) Time after time the demon threw the man into convulsions. He had been placed under constant guard and tied with chains and shackles, but crazed and driven wild by the demon, he would shatter the bonds.

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he said, because many demons afflicted him. And they begged Jesus desperately not to order them to the bottomless pit. A large herd of pigs was grazing and rooting on a nearby hill. The demons begged Jesus to order them into the pigs. He gave the order. It was even worse for the pigs than for the man. Crazed, they stampeded over a cliff into the lake and drowned. Those tending the pigs, scared to death, bolted and told their story in town and country. People went out to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had been sent, sitting there at Jesus' feet, wearing decent clothes and making sense. It was a holy moment, and for a short time they were more reverent than curious. Then those who had seen it happen told how the demoniac had been saved.

Later, a great many people from the Gerasene countryside got together and asked Jesus to leave—too much change, too fast, and they were scared. So Jesus got back in the boat and set off. The man from whom the demons had gone out begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Go home and tell everything God did in you." So he went back and preached all over town everything Jesus had done in him.

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

*"The man from whom the demons had gone out begged that he might be with him,
but Jesus sent him away."*

The bible passage for today is such a study in contrasts and reversals. Everything at the end is the opposite of the beginning. I guess that's what happens when Jesus enters your world, your community, your life.

At the beginning of the story: 1) The demoniac is living outside the town in a cemetery. The townsfolk are inside the city. 2) The man is in fear of Jesus. The townspeople are happy. 3) The man wants nothing to do with Jesus. The people have no problem with him being there.

At the end of the story: 1) The man is living happily inside the town. The townsfolk are outside the town, entombed in their fear. 2) The man wants to be with Jesus. The people want Jesus as far away from them as possible.

But before we can even begin to look at this, we have to take a look at the situation. Jesus meets a Gentile man in a Gentile town, possessed by demons, whose name is Legion (the same name as a group of Roman soldiers), living amongst tombs, surrounded by pigs.

You don't get much more foreign, filthy, disgusting or dirty than that – from a Jewish perspective.

So much for getting your act together before your ‘come to Jesus’ moment. In fact, you don’t even ‘come to Jesus,’ he comes to you. In all your brokenness, and no matter how the world has defined you.

JESUS COMES TO YOU!!!

And in fact, what often happens is those who you most think would reject him, end up transformed by him... and the respectable people end up finding him an anathema to their quiet and peaceful lives.

Of course, that was only true back then. We live in a different time and place. That wouldn’t happen today. We wouldn’t mind today if having that Jesus in our midst destroyed our livelihood. We wouldn’t mind it if that Jesus drove our pigs into the sea. What silly people THOSE PEOPLE were. They put profits ahead of people.

Our American Christianity wouldn’t have a problem with that Jesus. We haven’t wedded our Christianity to our capitalism, have we? A Christianity called the “Prosperity Gospel” would never make it in this country. We all know if it came down to choosing between Jesus and our standard of living, we’d all choose Jesus. Right?

But that point is low-hanging fruit compared to what happens next. There is something even crazier in this text. Something that doesn’t just flip my Christian script but flips me out.

It’s the last two verses in this text that I just can’t get my mind around. The man wants to follow Jesus. He wants to be a disciple.

AND JESUS SAYS, “NO!!! GO HOME!!!”

“The man BEGGED that he might be with Jesus, but Jesus SENT HIM AWAY.”

Say what? Has Jesus forgotten the Great Commission he issues in Matthew’s gospel, to “Go and make disciples of all nations”?

Isn’t that the whole point of being a follower of Jesus – to make more followers?

All my life I have been given the perspective that a Christian has only two options in dealing with non-Christians: to CONVERT THEM or CONDEMN THEM. Those were the only options.

I grew up singing “Onward Christian Soldiers, Marching as to War,” almost every Sunday, sometimes while walking up for Holy Communion – which confused the heck out of me, but that’s a topic for another time.

In my later years, it was “Lift High the Cross.” Where the ‘hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.’

Through it all, the point was to conquer, combine, fall in line. Those were the only options – to convert or condemn – but is there a third option?

What do we do with a Jesus who simply heals a man and then tells him to “Go home”? Simply sends him on his way?

That’s it. Go back to living a normal everyday life. In your Gentile town, in your Gentile home, with your Gentile neighbors.

Now Jesus does give him one instruction: to “declare how much GOD has done for you.” In other words, “Go live a life of thanksgiving.”

Now it should be noted as well, the man doesn't do that. It says he "went away, proclaiming to all the city what JESUS had done for him."

Which is not what Jesus asked of him. Jesus asked him to declare what GOD – NOT HE, JESUS – HAD done.

Maybe that's why Jesus didn't want him as a disciple – he couldn't follow directions. Not like with Peter and James and John – when Jesus asked them to stay awake with him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

So what do we do with a Jesus who doesn't convert or condemn, but simply heals and sets free? What do we do with a Jesus who doesn't seek a follower but a thankful heart? What do we do with a Jesus who isn't interested in how big his church is... errr, I mean... his parade of followers is?

Jesus simply heals and lets go. Simply sends him on his way.

But doesn't our Christianity demand that we make 'Christians' of others, 'followers of Jesus' of others? Or is there something more to it than that?

You know, we often say, "Jesus saves." But I wonder if we put the emphasis on the wrong word in that sentence.

We emphasize the word "Jesus," but for Jesus, according to this passage, the emphasis is on the word "saves."

Now a little word study. The word 'save' in Greek is the word 'Soter.' It means 'healing,' 'wholeness.' It's not so much a rescue from, as much as a putting back together. A re-connecting – a re-remembering.

To save someone is to heal someone, to make them whole.

This is what Jesus does. This is his mission. It isn't to make followers of people but to make healthy people, whole people. Even in the midst of all the forces that control and dominate them.

Apparently, according to Jesus there is something more important than himself. The welfare, the healing, the wholeness of a person is more important than being a follower.

Am I a heretic for saying that? Do I lose my status as a Christian for saying that?

What if I serve as a healing force in someone's life, then send them back home without forcing them to be a follower of Jesus... simply send them on their way...

Does that mean I don't take my Christianity seriously? Or, according to this passage does it mean I am walking in the exact footsteps of Jesus?

What do we say about Christians who go to other countries and help them dig wells, build hospitals, purify their water... all without forcing others to attend a worship service or putting them through a bible study?

What do we say to Christian universities, hospitals, and oh I don't know, let's say a retreat center which simply provide a place of healing and wholeness, growth and understanding for others, without demanding an adherence to their belief system? And then, simply sends people on their way?

Are they doing that out of timidity towards Christ, or because of Christ? Because that is what this passage shows, exemplifies, demands of us.

You know, I'm starting to have a little more sympathy for those townsfolk in our bible passage.

I'm feeling a little discombobulated here. I'm not even sure I should have said everything I just said. It kind of scares me and frightens me. This Jesus isn't at all what I expected. He's pushing me, pulling me. Stretching me in ways that are very disturbing to my quiet and peaceful Christian life.

And now, even more questions...

Does this mean it's wrong to call yourself a follower of Jesus? I certainly hope not. I would like to think of myself that way, though others may have their doubts about me. And there were, after all, disciples of Jesus. Twelve, if I remember correctly.

I guess my point is, or my question is: Is it mandatory for everyone else to respond to Jesus the same way I have?

Does my response to this person Jesus need to be prescriptive for others, or can I just let it be descriptive?

"Go back to your home and tell people what God has done for you."

Maybe that's good advice for me as well. Maybe I'm more like the demoniac than I thought. Only my demon is wanting everyone to be and act like me.

So perhaps there is a third option other than converting or condemning others.

Like Jesus in this meal, who neither converts nor condemns the disciples this evening. But rather, simply gives himself over to the denier and the betrayer and the rest. And yes, I am aware of the words of Jesus, *"But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed..."* in reference to Judas.

But in the end, Jesus' final act is giving him his body and blood, re-membering himself to Judas, as an act of forgiveness.

And then – even then – Jesus sends him on his way.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Spirit of the Living God

(Celtic Spirits)

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Life of Christ Renew Me

(Margaret Rizza)

Life of Christ renew me, Way of Christ direct me,
Truth of Christ restore me, Peace of Christ surround me. *repeat*

Word of Christ instruct me, Prayer of Christ enrich me,
Work of Christ inspire me, Light of Christ shine through me. *repeat*

Cross of Christ redeem me, Pain of Christ be in me.
Bread of Christ sustain me, Fire of Christ enflame me. *repeat*

Breath of Christ flow in me, Strength of Christ support me,
Joy of Christ uplift me, Love of Christ transform me. *repeat*

Peace of Christ surround me, Light of Christ shine through me,
Fire of Christ enflame me, Love of Christ transform me.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

Benediction

My Peace

(Keith Duke)

Peace to know, Peace to live,
Peace to show, and a peace to give.
It's a peace to share and a peace that cares.
My peace I give unto you. My peace.