

Luke 8:26-39
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Hampton Baptist
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Mission Trip Commissioning Service

"Is Jesus At Home?"

Those of you who know our daughter realize that Ally is quite the communicator; she always has been. When Ally was twenty-two months old, we had opportunity to visit the campus of Duke University. The construction on the old campus is extraordinary, and the Chapel is incredible. The Gothic architecture instilled a sense of reverence and awe within me. As I was gawking down the aisle, I could hear the echoing of toddler feet stomping behind me. Then she started saying our names, so the reverbering echo would return to her little ears. As we approached the altar, I recognized windows portraying the writers of the four gospels, much like our vestibules, and then a large window depicting Jesus.

Ally was familiar with a stained-glass window of Jesus. At that time, I was serving as an Associate Pastor at a church in Georgia which was graced with a beautiful window depicting Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Jennifer directed Ally's attention to the window, and said, "Ally, who's that?" This was a common practice with Ally and her parents while viewing pictures.

Ally shouted, "JESUS!!"

Then Jennifer asked Ally another question, which had become a game with us as well. "Where is Jesus?" To which Ally responded, "Jesus is at home."

Although Ally would respond in similar fashion when asked the whereabouts of *anyone*, I was interested in the idea that Jesus was at home in a worship facility. Unfortunately, many in society place Jesus' address at the physical location of a church building. If Jesus only resides in a church building, then you and I are in big trouble. If the Son of God came to this earth to set up shop in worship centers around the world, then Christianity would not be very effective. Thankfully, as I understand the Gospel, Jesus' home should *not* be the church building. Instead, Jesus' home should be our hearts.

Jesus came to show the world fully what God was like; as you know, this concept is called the incarnation. After the resurrection, the Church was instituted to continue the work of the incarnation. The Church was inaugurated to fulfill the mission of Jesus, which was to be the hands and feet of God. Our scripture indicated how Jesus gave us a glimpse into what God wants *us* to do. Let's look at the story of Legion.

Jesus had just left the masses to sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which was Gentile country. This was an area where he had not ministered; Luke is specific in telling us that they were going to an area *opposite* Galilee. We know this was Gentile territory, because of the presence of swine; Jews did not eat pork.

Yet even though Jesus had never ministered in that area, as soon as their ship landed, he was met by this weird man. Imagine what the man looked like. The guy was naked and homeless. His skin may have been leathery from living outside. His cheeks may have been drawn from lack of food. He probably was dirty and smelly. Certainly, he was thickly bearded, and there's no telling when he had washed his hair or bathed.

He lived in the tombs--a graveyard--among the dead. The tombs were natural caves or holes dug into the hillsides; this man probably made his home there to escape the elements. I wonder if a

man in this state of mind talked to the dead; after all, he obviously didn't have any friends around. *His* socialization was limited to dead folks.

His interaction with the living was restricted. My guess is that the community was frightened of him. He was often placed in shackles and chains and kept under guard. Who do you suppose placed him in these fetters? It had to be his neighbors, those of the community. I wonder if they hunted him down, or if he was captured when he would come to town? This shackling may have been done for his *own* good, but I imagine that it was performed for the protection of the community. Being on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the kind of greeting that Jesus received was enough to terrify tourists coming to visit. This was not the kind of publicity that the Chamber of Commerce encouraged.

Society sought to control or cage him in hopes of helping him. These actions were self-serving as well, to protect the community. I doubt that *rehabilitation* was the motive; instead *fear* reigned over their judgments and emotions.

For the man in the story, he was not caged for *long* periods of time, because his ruling powers would shatter the shackles. The forces of evil which possessed him were stronger than man-made fetters. Upon his emancipation, the man would escape to the desert, an appropriate place. After all, the desert was desolate, isolated, away from people who would cage him, and wild, just like the man.

So, as Jesus and the disciples got off the boat, after a tumultuous night at sea, they were met by this character who threw himself at Jesus' feet and exclaimed, "What have I to do with you, Jesus?" The recognition of Jesus by someone who didn't even know him was surprising. Or was it? Many who do not know us, may realize we are Christians by merely viewing our works. Our lifestyle tells others if we are followers of Jesus.

For those of us going on the Mission Trip, opportunities will abound for us to communicate to others about Christ. Repairing houses for the poor becomes opportunities to share God's love, which is incarnational in nature, following the model of Jesus. In our passage, the man asked a question, opening the door for Jesus to enter. Incarnational evangelism seeks to enter open doors with the gospel, rather than crashing down a closed door.

Jesus responded to the man's question with a question. "What is your name?" Names were important then and are important now. For Jesus to ask the name of this outcast, Jesus was communicating, "You are *somebody*. You are a person with a name, with hopes and dreams." Unfortunately, when placed in similar situations, instead of *asking* for a name, we *name* the person with titles such as bum, vagrant, or derelict. We often shackle this class of person, as did those in Jesus' day, with cages of avoidance. Our friendliness is to extend to all whom we encounter, even the untouchables we may meet this week. Jesus asked for a name; what do our actions request?

The man responded, "Legion," because of the evil forces that controlled him. You and I know some who could be called "Legion" because of the myriad of problems they possess. Some have so many problems that they don't know where to start. But today, I contend that we *all* could call ourselves Legion; we all possess disorders that complicate other circumstances which affect another situation. If we are honest with ourselves, we are all *problem*ed people; we are *all* Legions. And Jesus has asked us our name, hoping that we will allow Him to help us.

Jesus realized that Legion would never be free in his present condition, so he removed the powers that controlled him, and Legion was changed. Jesus could not *heal* him without dealing with the situation that *produced* his hurt. In being Christians, we have to do the same. The efforts on our Mission Trip provide the recipient an opportunity to free themselves from the financial burden that *shackles* them, even *limiting* their understanding of the free gift of God's grace. Because every person and every family is different, every situation is different. And in this situation, the townspeople didn't like what had happened.

A man, who had been a monster in the eyes of the townspeople, was now fully healed. He was in his right mind. To the menace of their society, Jesus had provided the rehabilitation that the shackles had failed to achieve. So you would think that the story would have a happy ending.

Instead, the people came in droves as word spread that a farmer had lost a herd of hogs. The headlines of the Gerasene Daily Press probably read "*Religious Fanatic Kills Farmer's Hogs,*" instead of reading "*The New Legion.*" People were more interested in the loss of personal possessions than in the changed life of an outcast.

All of us are rich by the world's standards with roofs over our heads at night and adequate food and clothing. Just outside the palatial condominiums and abounding affluence of Myrtle Beach, we will find poverty and substandard housing for the elderly and for those who work for the tourism industry. Jesus is telling us that human life is more precious than any amount of possessions.

The curious came to see what had happened. What they found was the former freak sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind. What they found was a miracle. As a result of his encounter with Jesus, Legion was changed. Sitting at someone's feet symbolized a discipling or teaching relationship. Legion no longer was controlled by the forces of evil; rather he was gladly submitting himself to Jesus. He was no longer naked, but clothed. Ever wonder where Legion got his clothes? I could envision Jesus turning to James, and saying, "James, what size tunic do you wear?" and then appealing to the disciples to clothe him. Legion was no longer convulsed by the forces of evil but rather was calm and in his right mind. And to the curious who came to see what had happened, fear swept over them like a crisp new broom. They were so alarmed that they asked Jesus to leave.

Why were they frightened? The eyewitnesses reported the event as a man being healed, yet the locals focused on the loss of property. The natives riveted on money and greed. What would be next? Would this guy also heal a worthless leper? Welcome a tax collector as an equal? Accept a prostitute as a person? Yes, YES, YES!! Because we know the character of Jesus, we recognize that Jesus always held *persons* in highest regard, no matter who they were.

The kind of evangelism that is modeled by Jesus in the story of Legion is one that deserves our attention. Clarence Jordan wrote, "This evangelism is based not on a sermon, not upon theory, not upon abstraction, but upon the Word of God becoming flesh and dealing with us--with us demoniacs--and restoring us to our right minds."

Legion requested to go with Jesus, which was a natural request. We all want to spend time with those who accept and affirm us. But Jesus told him to go home and share what great things God had done for him. Legion was directed to proclaim the good news of his liberation from the shackles of evil to the ones who had fettered him on many occasions. These were the same people who cared more about a herd of hogs than about his own welfare. These were the same folks who requested that Legion's Savior leave their countryside.

And Legion did as he was instructed. The Gospel *has* to be shared with those who need it most. If Jesus' address is a church building, if that is where Jesus stays, then it is only because we decide that is where Jesus will remain. Whether you are going on the Mission Trip or remaining in Hampton Roads this week, those who do not know Christ will never know him if Jesus stays within the church building. So today, as you depart, will you leave Jesus here? For the sake of a lost world, I hope not.