

Sermon on Luke 8:26-39

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Grace, Mercy and Peace to you from Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.

You have heard me, saying many times that **God meets us where we are!** My favorite theme! And Jesus said in John 15:16, "You did not choose me but I chose you." Well, today's gospel text shed some more light on that statement.

Let's first set the scene of the gospel lesson. Jesus is crossing over the Sea of Galilee to the land of the Gerasenes, which means that he's not just crossing the sea, **he's also crossing boundaries**. Because the land of Gerasenes is the land of Gentiles. Jesus leaves the comfortable, predominantly Jewish area of Galilee and crosses the sea to the land of the Gerasenes. (That crossing over was not a smooth boat ride; as you may recall the whole story in Luke 8:22-25, the verses before our Gospel text of today. Jesus fell asleep while the disciples were fighting for their lives in a big windstorm and they woke him up and he calmed the sea...).

Now, a man in his birthday suit (a new vocab that Duane and Walt taught me last week), who lived in the tombs area and possessed by demons, fell down before Jesus and declared, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most high God? I beg you, do no torment me?" (Luke 8:28)

One thing we know about this young man is that he dwells among the dead in the tombs, which is another place considered ritually unclean. So here is the thing in our gospel text today: Jesus, the preacher who proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God, goes to an unclean land to meet a man possessed by an unclean spirit, living in an unclean place.

I found it very interesting that the army of Satans (legion) living inside this young man, recognized well who Jesus was, "the Son of the Most High God" he shouted. But Jesus' response instead of saying Amen, you are right.... rebuked and commanded the unclean spirits to come out of the man and we may wonder why? I will answer that at the end of my sermon but let's continue our reflection about what transpired in this text.

So here is the question for us to ponder. Why would Jesus bother to go the other's (non-Jewish) territory? This is like the very last place Jesus should be in my thinking. But on the other hand, that is exactly what God does. God usually shows up when we the least expect it. We know that. Right? God shows up in our moments of profound doubt. God shows up in the time when we are grieving, when sometimes, we feel lost and being defeated. Yes, God can surprise us in many ways to establish our relationship with God. **God meets us where we are...!**

We know what happened in this gospel. Right away, after restoring the young man to a normal life, Jesus sails back home again. Which may mean that the whole trek across a stormy sea and turbulent run-in with some fearful people for Jesus was just to meet this young man. A young man created in the Image of God. A young man who God loves so much.

Here is the thing, Trinity members, there is absolutely nowhere God is not willing to go to reach and to free and to sustain and to heal those who are broken and in despair. There is no place on this earth that has God-forsaken. There is no person on this earth that is God-forsaken. You can name it. Unclean. Outcast. Abandoned. Forsaken. Unpopular. Incarcerated. Unbeliever. No one is left out. Jesus died for all and God wants us all to be saved. That is why Jesus sends this healed young man back home and told him, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you". And the young man went away, proclaiming throughout the CITY how much Jesus had done for him. He did not just go to his home but to the whole CITY.

Today, we are reminded by Jesus' work that we are more than the sum total of our past failures and disappointments. We are more than a loser or whatever someone may want to call us. We are God's beloved children, forgiven of our sins, healed of our disappointments, and blessed with an open future. That is the whole point of Jesus' ministry and mission, to tell us and to show us how much God loves us.

And in return, we share God's love to the world in our life. That is what Jesus wants from any of us who God called as a beloved child during our baptism and now calls us to share God's love to others. It is our call and our duty to share God's love, to strive for justice and peace on this earth.

The good news for us is that there are no conditions to be met to receive God's love. We don't have to be wealthy...or poor. We don't have to be from one ethnic group...or another. We don't have to have believed our whole life, or come to faith only recently, or to be spiritual but not religious or to not have any faith at all. Jesus seeks out everyone, even this unclean man possessed by an unclean spirit living in an unclean place. And just so God loves all: male and female; young and old; gay or straight; white, black, Asian, Latino; believers and non-believers; Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, atheist; yes, everyone...

Just a week ago today, we have seen on TV or heard on radio the recent violent crime of hate and terror, **done to us**, and **I insist on "to us"** as we are all created in the image of God. Terrific tragedy was done to some of us, as God's people. Whatever the reasons for doing this, for sure, it is not an act of love but of hate. It is not from God but from evil. Never forget that you are a beloved child of God. May God's Peace which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.