

Sermon – Port Macquarie – 20th June 2010 – Luke 8:26-39.

When Jesus came calling:

Demons and evil spirits, we do not like to talk about them much, except when they are on the movies or in some TV show. There they are unreal and we can handle the unreal, but when it comes to real life demons we seem to shirk from them and do not want to face or deal with them.

Also when we start looking at the existence of demons we need to be careful that we do not look for demons under every rock or around every corner. For some of the things that happen in our lives are the result of our own decision making and not evil spirits.

***In 1 John 4 verse 1 “we read “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God,...” So we need to be careful when we talk or pray about the spirit world and need to check them against the word of God. There are many incidents throughout history where this has not been done and people have been accused of being possessed to the point of execution just because they were a bit different. The witch trials of Salem are a case in point.**

Evil spirits were also call demons, devils and unclean spirits, and we see that in the biblical accounts. Anyone who had a problem was thought to be under their control was said to be a demonic or demon possessed.

I would venture that most of us, if not all of us have had to face our demons at some point. These demons could come in the form of Mental Illness, Personality Disorders, phobias, an addiction, a life threatening illness, chronic illness, and the big one depression leading to self-harm, the list goes on.

In our reading from Kings 1 we see that Elijah, coming off a high of having shown the power of God in defeating the prophets of Baal and upset Queen Jezebel, had to run for his life, Elijah told God he had had enough and fell into self-pity to the point of wanting to die.

So who amongst us has never had a time of trouble, strife or stress in their life journey, or never been angry or in pain to a point where you could have

been out of your mind and felt down and depressed, even after a high point in your life?

These are tough times for us and often take us to a desert place, or a place of desolation, where we feel alone, afraid and may even question God and his existence. Elijah found himself in the desert spiritually and physically just as we do in similar situations.

One of the common characteristics of struggling with *dark power* on a personal level is the attendant isolation and withdrawal. We recall from the temptation story, Jesus was alone in the wilderness, when he was accosted by Satan himself and by temptation and trial.

In my own life journey, especially in the earlier years I can relate to the problem of anger for I really let go when I got angry, often at something trivial and would lose for a time a sense of logic and reality. It was scary even to myself, and I was not a nice person. Thankfully God through Christ has helped me deal with this situation.

During these times of anger or pain my spirit was in a dry place as normality departed and thus was vulnerable to spiritual attack by Satan and his minions, because when you are in this place you can take your eye off Jesus, just for a moment.

I feel that this is the case with our Demon Possessed Man when Jesus stepped ashore and found himself confronted with this man who was not in his right mind. We do not know why he was in this state but we do know that he had a number of problems/demons that were causing him grief.

The demons that inhabited this man caused him to be uncontrollable for he kept breaking the chains that the townsfolk had tried to keep him in place with. His condition had him to a point of severe depression for he was violent and caused himself self-harm as well as scaring off the neighbours.

To top it off he lived in a grave yard, a definite place of solitude and loneliness, a real desert place. The demons in our lives, whatever they are, can cause our lives to get out of control, just like our Genesee friend

The scriptures in Romans 8:18-39 make it clear that a fallen world is still influenced by the presence of sin and Satan, and will be until the Lord's return.

As he confronts Jesus the Spirits that were causing this man grief spoke out and challenged Jesus as to why he was there, they ranted and raved at Jesus and asked if he was out to get them?

Jesus is not deterred by the screaming. He continues a direct, frontal assault on the evil power which has taken control of this man. *"What is your name?"*

We note that the evil spirits recognised Jesus for who he is quicker than either his disciples or the others with him do, say "Jesus Son of God, are you here to destroy us". These demons had been affecting this man's life for a long time and there many of them. As our passage tells us the demons claimed their name to be "Legion"

So the moment Jesus appears, the dark powers which have come to control the man in our story begin to cry out, for the light of the world had come. In the prologue in John 1 we read of the light of the world and that the light came to expel the darkness in people's lives. For one of the most important tools in the arsenal of us when we confront evil is truth and light.

We need to note that this miracle is not only about exorcism or dispelling the evil spirits; it is especially about the liberation of a soul from that which binds it.

The light of Christ was shining on them and they were afraid of their future asking Jesus not to send them into the abyss but into a herd of pigs. Jesus says "go ahead - as you wish" and off they went to their destruction for the pigs all died.

Also to deal with the evil we see that we need to name the offending spirit!

You must look the lie, the problem, in the face and name it, alcoholism, anger, hate, lying, racism, mental illness.

Then once the wrong is named, it can be evicted. To name the wrong or the injustice or the evil is to shine light on or bring truth to the situation. *"You shall know the truth,"* Jesus said, *"And the truth shall set you free."*

For when you tell the truth and confront the lie the healing can begin.

So when Jesus came to visit on that amazing day, it was no longer business as usual. For when Jesus is present, people and conditions are challenged, upset, transformed. His visit to the Gerasenes makes quite an impact. Almost before he can get off the boat, Jesus is met the man described as demon

possessed. He appears to be crazed and he is shouting at Jesus to leave him alone, not to torment him. We learn as the story unfolds that here is the transforming power of God's grace at work.

These spirits had kept this man in terrible bondage for a long time, but the power of Jesus is greater and Satan and his evil spirits are defeated foes. They will still strive to thwart the work of Christ, but they will not succeed. They may even rock the boat of your life but they will not sink it for Christ is there. They may recommend evil to a person but they cannot compel anyone to sin for as John West reminded us last week we all have a choice when temptation comes.

Powerful they may be but they too are subject to Christ and they cannot go and inhabit a herd of pigs without his permission.

This fear of the new is not unknown to us. We see it in churches and individuals that cling to old patterns of living, even when it is clear that those old patterns are not life-giving; and if Jesus comes to visit, we just might ask him to leave like the Gerasenes, afraid of what he might do to our familiar ways.

So what are the demons in your life that you need to address with the light of Christ? What is it that you need Jesus help to overcome and be freed from or are you happy living with your demons?

Are you afraid of the change that Jesus will bring to your life, the life of the church, and what the future may hold, health, peace, love, joy, patience, self-control? Or are you afraid that if you are released from your bondage you will receive less notoriety. Or are you going to be like the towns folk who came out to check on what had happened to their pigs and what was going on and then ask Jesus to leave? They too were bound, blinded by the Devil and failed to see what had taken place. What a tragedy for all to see God's grace at work and pretend nothing has really happened just like these towns folk, who could only see the now, not the future.

There is also another side to Jesus' visit in our story, and that is of the man who was healed. Jesus has given him back his life and changed him from a naked, howling, tormented man who lived in the graveyard, to one who sits at the feet of Jesus clothed and in his right mind. No wonder the town's people were amazed and afraid.

We then see that the healed man is so grateful that he pleads to be allowed to go with Jesus back to Galilee, but at Jesus' direction he becomes an apostle to his hometown, bursting with the good news of what Jesus has done for him. He didn't need to raise support for his ministry he simply needed to start sharing his story. And he could not tell the story of God's work in his life without discussing Jesus.

When Jesus heals you and frees you from what binds you, would you not want to tell somebody about Jesus and what he has done for you?

Jesus has shone his light into my troubled areas and I want everyone to know just like our brother in Gerasene.

If fear is our response to the power of Jesus and to the possibility of new life, I imagine the man saying to us, "I understand your fear, but don't be too quick to send Jesus away, for I wouldn't want to go back to who I was before Jesus came calling, for anything. Just let go of what binds you and put your trust in Jesus to make the best of your life.

You and I never know when or where Jesus is going to turn up. He just might come to you or me today with an offer of healing and new life, a new calling and with the power to make it happen. In fact he stands on the shore of our lives and waits for us to run to him.

May each of us be open to what Jesus might do in us when he next pays us a visit?

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18/6/2010