

"Go Home!"  
Luke 8:26-39

June 23, 2019

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

When I was a young kid and our family would go on some outing - to the lake, to visit relatives, or something like that, our return ride home always involved this question asked by my siblings and myself, "Can we stop somewhere and get something to eat?" My brother, sister, and I had in mind stopping at McDonald's, Dairy Queen or some other place for ice cream or some other treat. We were delighted (at least the first time that we heard this) when my father would say, "Yes, we can stop. We'll stop at 2108 Kenwood Ave." Of course, in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where I grew up, there was no Dairy Queen, McDonalds', or any other hamburger place or ice cream shop at that address. It was our home address. Not having money for a treat or simply not wanting to stop, my father was, in essence, telling us, "We can go home and get something to eat there."

Of course, getting something to eat at home wasn't as exciting as stopping at Dairy Queen or as appealing to us as stopping at McDonald's. So, we would usually whine, complain, or fight about it until, before you knew it, our car was pulling into the driveway at 2108 Kenwood Ave. It's not as if we didn't like our home, but after a special day we were hoping for a special treat. However, instead of something special to top off our big day, we had to go home.

In a way, that might be what the man possessed by demons in the country of the Gerasenes felt in our Gospel lesson for today. He certainly had had a big day. It began with him possessed by dozens and dozens of demons who caused him to do some really strange things. Yet, when Jesus came to him, Jesus cast out all of the evil spirits from the man. He was completely cured, the text says (although the word for cured literally means "saved".) The people of the village came to find the man sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothes, and in his right mind.

What a great day that was! The man wanted to end it in a special way. He was excited. His life had changed. Not only was he no longer possessed by unclean spirits, but he now was a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit of God. He was saved from demon possession and he was saved for eternal life.

So, when it came time for the disciples and Jesus to get in the boat and leave, the man wanted to go, too. This man wanted to go off on a mission trip and bring this good news of Jesus Christ of the world. However, in wanting to conclude his special day with a trip to a special destination, much like my brother, sister, and I had wanted to do as children, he received an answer from Jesus that kind of like my father's answer to us: "Yes, you can go. Go home!" Now that sounds rather harsh. Was Jesus rejecting him or insulting him? Was Jesus denying him the opportunity to spread the Good News? Would He ever give a command like that to us?

Our situation is not unlike this man. The Word of God tells us that we are born spiritually dead in sin and under the control of the devil. You could say that, we, too, were possessed by the devil when we came into this world. The ancient Church fervently believed this. Baptismal ceremonies at Luther's time usually began with an

exorcism in which the evil spirits were cast out so that the Holy Spirit could enter in. We have a modified version of this in our own hymnal today where the candidate for baptism is asked, “Do you renounce the devil? Do you renounce all his works? Do you renounce all his ways?” This demon possession which we experience may not seem to be as pronounced or noticeable as the one in our text. We are not walking around naked and living in the cemetery. However, anyone who is not under God’s control is de facto under Satan’s control.

Like in the text, Jesus arrived at the shores of earth in order to free us from the devil’s control. Satan can control us only through our sin and by the power of death. If those could be done away with, then Satan loses his control of us. However, to do so would come with a price – a very high price. Yet, Jesus was willing to pay the price to redeem us – buy us back – by offering His innocent life in place of our guilty lives. So, that’s what Jesus decided to do, in obedience to His Father’s will: offer up His life as the payment for our sin.

Jesus’ sacrificial death has successfully paid for all sin, big or small; thought word or deed; doing bad or failing to do good; intentional or accidental; from past, present, or future. Having been forgiven all of our sins, death no longer can hold us or hurt us. By Jesus’ overcoming sin and overcoming death, Satan has lost all of his weapons by which he can control or possess us. We are free. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is the receipt for that payment of our sins and is the ratification of our newfound freedom.

In our Baptism, we have been personally freed from the devil’s possession. The unclean spirits of the devil’s horde have received the boot. It is now the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and controls us. The uncleanness of our sin has been washed away in Holy Baptism. We have Christ’s righteousness as our own and are pure and holy in God’s eyes. Like the demoniac, we have a new and peaceful life. We’ve been truly “healed” (or, as the Greek literally has it, “saved”).

Like the man freed from demons, we, having been freed from Satan’s control; having received forgiveness for all of our sins; having been given Christ’s own righteousness in Holy Baptism; and having been truly freed for a new life here on this earth and a new life in the world which is to come, want to tell others about this. We want others to know what we know; to share in the new life which we live; and to experience freedom from Satan which we now enjoy. We want others to have what we have forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In our zeal and in our eagerness to share the Good News, we want to climb in the boat with Jesus and the disciples and head out. Would Jesus ever tell us, “Go home” like He told the man from whom He had cast out demons? Well, why DID Jesus tell it to the man in the first place?

The text gives us no indication. If you think about it, he would’ve been a very strong candidate to be a missionary. He was eager and ready to go! He evidently had no possessions or family to hold him down. He was as willing and is dedicated to follow Jesus wherever He would go as any of the disciples. He could easily give up all that he had and be ready to go right away.

Secondly, he certainly would have a great personal testimony to share as a part of Jesus traveling missionary group. I mean, he was better than a recovering alcoholic or an ex-con who had gone straight. Imagine him mesmerizing audiences everywhere by saying, “Thousands of demons lived in my body and possessed me. I walked around naked. I lived in the tombs. I could not free myself from this spiritual imprisonment. I was the foulest and most unclean persons there was, but Jesus has cleansed me, freed me, and I now stand before you today healed and saved.”

So, why did Jesus not want this man, an ideal candidate for missionary, to get on the boat, join the group, and evangelize the world? We can't say. Jesus doesn't say. However, Jesus did say, “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.”

Notice: Jesus was not critical of the man, nor did he reject him. Jesus did not reject his service, either. Jesus simply redirected his service to a different place which may not have been as glamorous as the man may have hoped. “Go home”, said Jesus, “and declare or preach or proclaim how much God has done for you.” The man went without complaint. The text says, “And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.”

In our zeal to proclaim the gospel to those who have not yet heard it, we may be tempted to think that the only real mission work is done in places that are far away from ourselves and much more interesting than our own location. Now, it is true that some people who desire to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ figuratively get on the boat and travel to faraway places to do that. Men leave their homes, are taught the Word of God at the seminary, and are sent off to faraway places to proclaim the Good News.

Some are pastors like myself. When I had a call to serve as pastor in Billings in 1985, I remember thinking who would go that far away to serve as a pastor? About 20 years later I found the answer to my question.

Some are missionaries who go to even farther away places to proclaim the Word of God. Our congregation supports two of these men who are sons of the congregation: Eric and Andrew. They've gone to places like Ethiopia, Mexico City, and other faraway places because they want to proclaim the Word of God.

Jesus does not forbid them or reject them. Jesus calls them and sends them to these faraway places. So there is nothing wrong about leaving home and becoming a missionary or pastor. However, a problem develops if people think that, if they don't become a pastor or don't become a missionary to a faraway country, then they have no place in spreading the Gospel.

To some people, Jesus simply says, “Go home!” Not everyone has to go to the faraway places to share the gospel. Not everyone has to go to the exciting and interesting places. Many serve God and bring the gospel to people at home where they live. If you do not have a seminary diploma, do not go halfway around the world to spread the gospel or do not get a lot of publicity by going to minister at the “in places”, it doesn't mean that God is rejecting you for service, that you are on the Gospel B team, or that your work is of little or no importance because it is not done on a big stage.

While there are millions of people throughout the world who need the Gospel, there are a good number of people in our own towns and farmlands who need the gospel, too. It is to them that God is sending you when He says go home. God is preparing each one of you to testify to the Gospel in the exact place where He has placed you and at the exact time He has placed you there.

There is no record that the man in our story complained to Jesus about going home. Since the emphasis was the message and not the messenger, this man seemed to gladly go back home, "proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him." I would think that a goodly number of people came to faith in Jesus Christ because of his enthusiastic and energetic witness. These are people who quite possibly would not have been saved had the man stayed on the boat with Jesus.

Let there be no disappointment or complaint about the corner of the kingdom of God in which He has placed us. Let there be no jealousy of people that we considered to be "real" missionaries or discouragement about the seeming lack of mission work here. You and I may not have the same dramatic testimony that the man who was rescued from the control of thousands of demons had, but we still have the same message. We still have the same command and call from Jesus to go and proclaim throughout the city and the state how much God has done for us.

God the Father has created us, loved us as a true father loves, and cares for all of our needs, both physical and spiritual. God the Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross to earn forgiveness for all of our sins that we might stand before God on the final day and who rose from the dead to gain life everlasting for us with Him in heaven. God the Holy Spirit has brought this message of forgiveness, life, and salvation to us and, by the use of the Word of God, created faith in us to believe that. He now empowers us to share that message, that hope, and that life with others.

There are many more ways to share the Gospel message than calling yourself a missionary and going off to a faraway place. Our hymn of the day reminds us that it's not always the big things and the important people who do the work of the Lord.

If you cannot speak like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul,  
You can tell the love of Jesus, You can say He died for all.  
If you cannot rouse the wicked With the judgment's dread alarms,  
You can lead the little children To the Savior's waiting arms.

Going home when you would rather go someplace special can be disappointing, but it doesn't have to be. The man freed from Satan's control by Jesus in our text today, but not allowed to get on the boat and join the mission team was hardly disappointed. Jesus told him to go home and he made the best use of that opportunity to tell what God had done for him. If you don't find yourself on the path to the seminary, sharing the gospel in a faraway country, or involved in some glitzy ministry that's getting a lot of attention, don't be disappointed. Go home. Go home and share God's love in your family, with your friends, at school, and in the community. Go home and tell everything that God has done, is doing, and will do for you. Go home. You'll be glad you did. Amen.