

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Evangelism Sunday ✠

February 5, 2006

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

“As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.” (Mark 5:18-20, NIV)

Abraham and his son Isaac were making a trip. They were quite a ways into the trip when Isaac sensed they were missing something. They were going to offer a sacrifice but they had brought nothing to sacrifice. Isaac asked his father about this, to which Abraham calmly replied, “The Lord will provide.” Abraham knew that Isaac was supposed to be the sacrifice, but as it turned out, the Lord did provide the sacrifice. Once Abraham had demonstrated his willingness to offer his only son Isaac, God did provide a ram for the sacrifice.

God has also given us something to do. We’re hearing about that task in the words of the lessons and hymns today. It is God’s will that we speak the gospel to others – that we do evangelism.

But I think sometimes we’re like Isaac and we wonder if we’re missing something. We wonder if we’re missing something we need to carry out the work God has given us. But then we hear words like the Gospel for today, words in which Jesus reminds us, “I will provide. I’ll provide everything you need for the task and the road ahead of you.” Jesus calls us, in a sense, to be missionaries, to proclaim the word of Jesus. But **Jesus also provides for his missionaries**. He provides them with motivation, a mission field, and a message.

Our text is really the very end of the account of one of Jesus’ miracles. There was a man who had been severely possessed by demons. In fact, when Jesus spoke to the demon, the demon said, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” As a result, the man was forced to live like an animal, outside of the town. They had tried chaining him, but he broke free. When Jesus commanded the spirits to come out of the man, they asked to go into a herd of pigs instead. When Jesus agreed, the spirits went into a herd of two thousand pigs, who immediately ran into the lake and drowned. After seeing this, the people in that region asked him to leave. And this is where our text picks up. We read, **“As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.”**

We really don’t know anything else about this man. We don’t even know what his name is. He is simply called **“the man who had been possessed by demons.”** All we know about this man is what he *used to be*.

Before this time this man’s whole life had been affected by the demon-possession. It wasn’t simply a little problem he had that no one knew about that and that he tried to hide. No, his entire existence was all tied up in the fact that he was possessed by demons. That’s what he knew and what he was known for.

But now all that had changed. Now he could live among people again, and could talk with them. Basically, Jesus gave this man his life back.

And he responded to this momentous gift by begging Jesus to let him go with him. He wanted to be with Jesus. He wanted to serve Jesus and be his disciple. You can just sense his excitement and his motivation, can't you? And you can understand why he would act that way. Jesus' miracle had motivated him to serve Jesus.

The miracle that Jesus has worked in you and me is just as miraculous and life-changing as this one in our text. And so I wonder how the story would read if the Evangelist Mark would have written about one of us. I wonder that word Mark would have used to describe one of us. Certainly not "the man possessed by demons," but maybe it would be similar. He might have called us "the man who had been a slave to sin." Or "the child who was born an enemy of God." Or perhaps "the woman who was on her way to eternal death and hell for her sins." The truth is, we could be described by any one of those because that's the way we were born. You see, our sin isn't something that is a little problem for us. It's a big problem. It's who we are. We're not called "sinner" because we occasionally slip up. It's not because we sometimes make mistakes. By nature, sin is all we know and it's all we're known for.

So it's no small thing when God enters our life and changes it completely around. He takes children who are born as enemies of God and calls them his dear children when they are baptized. He takes slaves to sin; people on their way to hell and turns them into heirs of eternal life. What an astounding thing God has done! And what's more he gives you ample opportunities to hear his Word, to hear again and again the message of his forgiving love. He gives you regular opportunity to come to the Sacrament of the Altar and receive his true body and blood--the very body and blood Jesus used to accomplish your redemption.

Jesus provides us with all the motivation in the world. He motivates us to say with this man in our text. Jesus, I want to be with you. I want to serve you.

And, of course, we have all kinds of ideas about how we can serve Jesus, right? Well, so did this man. He wanted to get in the boat and travel with Jesus. But we read, "**Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."**

The man had been motivated by Jesus' compassion and love for him and he wanted to serve Jesus. But Jesus said no. You'd think that this kind of rejection could have crushed this man's faith and his eagerness to serve. But Jesus doesn't just say, "no", he provides this man with a mission field, another place for him to serve.

Jesus directs the man to go home. He says, "Use your zeal and your energy and direct it toward those among whom you live. Go home and speak to your family and the people in your community."

Why do you suppose Jesus did that? Was it because Jesus simply didn't need any help? After all, he already had chosen his 12 disciples. Perhaps there wasn't room in the boat? Or maybe, he told this man to go back to his family and community because Jesus knew that they needed it. Jesus had to go back to Galilee, but the people in the Decapolis still needed to hear the message about Jesus. And so he sent the man home.

You know that there is no shortage of people today who have not heard about Jesus, or at least the truth about Jesus. And you know that you don't need to travel to Africa or China to find them. They live next door. Their offices are down the hall. Their lockers are next to you at school. They might even live under the same roof as you. And Jesus reminds us that they are

our mission field – they are our opportunity to use the motivation he has given us. We want to serve Jesus. And Jesus says to us, “Okay, then go home. Talk to your neighbor, or your friend, or your relative.”

Jesus doesn’t limit our witness to unbelievers, though. For many of us, the members of our families are primarily Christians. Granted, some of them may be at different levels of growth and knowledge in the Christian faith, but they consider themselves and we consider them Christian. That doesn’t remove them from our mission field. That doesn’t take away our opportunity, at various times and places, to speak the word of Jesus to our families.

The widest example of this when parents carry the good news to their children. God places us into families at least in part for that very reason, so that through the family, from parent to child, the message of Jesus Christ is passed on from one generation to another. You want to serve Jesus. Then go home and tell your family. See to it that “Jesus-talk” is welcome in your home. Take the opportunity to talk about the words of Jesus, “when you sit at home and when you ride in the car, when you lie down and when you get up.”

I can almost hear your thoughts. I can just hear someone saying, “that’s nice and all, and I’d like to do all that, but I really don’t know what to say.” Well, Jesus has provided for that as well. He didn’t leave the man in our text without a message. He told him what to say: **“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.”**

You don’t need to make anything up. You don’t need to come up with a speech or a sermon. Jesus told the man simply to repeat what Jesus had done for him. And that’s really all he asks us to speak as well – whether it’s over the backyard fence or across the dinner table. Just repeat what you know. He has provided us with the message – it’s exactly the same message he used to win us-the message of his mercy

And if you’re still not sure what to say, then listen some more to what God has done for you. Listen to it when it’s read and read it on your own. Recall the mercy Jesus has shown to you in your own baptism whenever you see a child baptized or you see a baptismal font. Ponder it and appreciate it when your Lord offers you his mercy in his holy Supper. And when you put yourself again on the receiving end of the message, you find again your motivation to serve Jesus, and you find that the mission field begins in your own heart. And in the heart of a Christian, you see a cycle begin to repeat: from motivation to mission field, to message and back again. The cycle repeats again and again. And finally you see that the Lord Jesus has truly provided everything you need.

Whenever I travel I almost always spend the first leg of the trip wondering what I forgot. It’s often so troubling that I have a hard time enjoying the trip because I wonder what I might have left behind. I eventually get to the point where I realize that I probably have everything I’ll need and much more.

As Christian we can have the tendency and temptation to go through life thinking of the things we are missing to carry out tasks that God calls us to carry out, including the privilege to speak the gospel message to others. But we don’t need to. We can rest assured that Jesus provides for his missionaries. He provides everything we need – the motivation, the mission field, and the message. And praise be to God – that the very things we need to carry out the work of evangelism are the things that keep us and sustain us in faith. May we rest in those things Jesus our Lord has provided us us, his missionaries.