

“The Church Is a Missionary People”

John 17:18 and Luke 8:26-39

Sunday May 6, 2018

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We are looking at Jesus’s prayer from John 17, which he prayed on the way to suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, arrest, crucifixion and resurrection. It is a record of what he prays that we, the Church, will be in this world. Today we see Jesus prays that the church is a sent people, a people on mission whenever and wherever we are.

John 17: 18.

As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

Because Jesus was sent, the Church is a people who are sent, whose lives are patterned after his. How? Lots of places we could turn, but let’s look at one such occasion of Jesus being sent and find out. Luke 8:26-39.

²⁶ Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time, he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.” ²⁹ For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. ³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. ³² Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

³⁴ When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. ³⁶ And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷ Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

In reading recently, I’m reminded, the church is not simply a place where you go, not the building, although important. We are creatures with bodies and space, buildings, architecture does indeed matter. And yet, the church is a people who go into the broken mess of this world with the mending, healing grace of the gospel, following the pattern of Jesus. We go around the world and down the block. Jesus prays that we would be sent as he was sent.

What mission do we follow in the pattern of Jesus?

Jesus leads and sends us into the darkest places.

Text tells us, v. 26, **They sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.**

For Jewish boy, crossing the sea of Galilee was tricky. Galilee was for the Jews, but the other side of the lake was the Decapolis, the 10 cities that were more Greek than anything else, filled with Greek pagan influence. That was where Gentiles lived, the foul, pagan, and unclean. However, Jesus got in the boat and the storm from earlier in chapter 8 could not deter him from this crossing the sea, invasion of Gentile lands.

The place where they landed could not have been worse...in the middle of pig farm, v. 32. Even being there would have made them unclean! What was he thinking? Taking a bunch of good Jewish boys smack in the middle of unclean. Why did Jesus do that? Followers of Jesus follow him into the dark places with the message, as ambassadors, of the King, to mend who and what are broken. **There is no place Jesus refuses to go to restore what is broken.**

If the church is doing its job, we are taking the gospel into the neediest places in our community, because we are who Jesus prays for us to be: a sent people. Wherever we go—around the world or down the block, we go as a people who are sent by God. The church is an outpost of the colony of heaven. He came, so we go. To restore broken people and places.

As Jesus prays in [John 17:17](#), it is “into the world” that we are sent. Extending out from the holy huddle into the hard places around us. At times we as the church seem about retreat from the world because we feel uncomfortable or afraid. Sometimes we may feel like we don’t have answers to address the real problems, the real disastrous effects of sin that ravage lives. What places feel like the place from which we flee rather than go? What feels like the “pig farm” in our lives, the places we refuse to go, to people to whom we fear to go?

I’ve heard Randy sing the song tongue in cheek before, “Lord, don’t send me to Africa.” But do we sometimes sing, Lord, don’t send me to my neighbor; they might think I’m one of those religious nuts. Lord, don’t send me to extend kindness and love to someone whose lifestyle, whose sexuality, does not express what your Word clearly says is best. I’m afraid both to tell the truth AND to move toward others in love. Just don’t send me there. Lord, don’t send me into a relationship of friendship with a person of a different race who is upset about the racial injustices in our city and I just can’t and maybe don’t want to understand. It all seems so complicated and too hard. Don’t send me to that place. Lord, certainly don’t send me to love and serve refugees who are all around us. To my co-worker. To my peers at school.

And yet, it is into the world, into the broken, the difficult places that Jesus sends us...because when we were the broken, difficult and trapped in sin, that is when he came for us and gave his life for us.

Jesus sends us to Value People, his Image Bearers, over Comfort.

Jesus lands and a guy comes screaming, v. 27, naked with wild eyes, like an animal. Maybe it was still dark, and as you get out of the boat, you begin to hear this blood curdling scream, v 28, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” That would scare me. Out pops this notorious man who could not be restrained. He lived in the tombs, smelled like death. Can you imagine what he looked like, what he smelled like?

This guy was death walking around. Yet, Jesus [healed him](#), v. 29. Healing and restoration for the broken is found at the feet of Jesus. The one who seems to be least likely is the one who is transformed.

When this happens, the good folks of town come and ask Jesus to leave. ³⁶And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned.

Why? Because [they were afraid](#), v. 37. Afraid of what? Of his power and afraid because commerce was disrupted. Remember, the herd of pigs was plunged into the sea. Their economy was wiped out. That is a serious problem. They feared, what else will this Jesus do?

Is that ethical? Does Jesus not care about livelihood for this region, their commerce and food sources? Some critics fault Jesus here for destroying the pigs. But that is precisely the point, I think. To Jesus, economic security was not more important than this pained, troubled image bearer of God.

Was Jesus concerned? Of course, he was, and yet perhaps the problem is that the town folks counted a herd of pigs, their economic security, their comfort, more valuable than this desperate man. Jesus didn’t. The pigs were important and valuable--yes. But this man was worth more! This man was made in the image of God, no matter how defiled and scarred.

In this town, people gawked at him, counted him worthless. He’s just that guy who lives in the tombs: he’s dirty, poor, not a contributor to our society, doesn’t pull his weight. His health and life is worth less than our pigs—keeping the economy strong. But not to Jesus. Jesus created him in his own image, and no matter how deeply this man had been defiled, impacted by evil, no matter the stench of death upon him...Jesus loved him and saved him! He restored his health, sanity and dignity. There is no person too far gone for Jesus to save.

This is one of those places where Jesus’s values may collide with American values. The Christian faith is not about the can do spirit, where if I work hard and pull myself up, who knows what I can do. That’s American, but it is not biblical.

Christianity is for the vulnerable, the weak, the outcast, NOT the strong. The Christian faith, the gospel of Jesus is about the Lord coming for a people who were the weak, the wounded, the outcast, the poor, the broken, the vulnerable. The unable until he saved us.

In our lives, whose dignity is easy to dismiss? To step over and not consider? Is it a poor person? Is it a criminal? Is it a person whose lifestyle you find reprehensible? Perhaps someone with whom you disagree politically—strongly. Yet, Jesus calls us to treat each person, each image bearer with dignity because of the One who made them to be like him, even when we are broken. Who is that person in your life?

An amazing point in this story is that the possessed man was not the only lost guy there. The crowds were no less lost than the raving maniacal man. He was lost in the tombs...the crowds, worried about their pigs, were lost in their self-importance, self-reliance and comfort. But, only the one whose need was exposed found healing. Lost people need the cross of Jesus to pay for our guilt. Whether our guilt is more visible like this man, or perhaps those hidden and respectable sins like perhaps the crowds—like ours, each are guilty and need the blood of Jesus to cleanse us.

The death visible on the outside of the demon-possessed man was the same death on the inside of the crowds—in our hearts, too. We need Jesus, the evil and vile, as well as the respectable merchants among us.

To Jesus, no one is beyond the reach of his grace. He bled and died and was raised again to save all kinds of lost people. People like you and me. But the cost is the exposure of our weakness to his healing grace. There is no one too crazy, no one too evil, no one too broken, no one too self-important and no one too different. Not even me.

Jesus sends madmen and women to become missionaries.

³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying,

³⁹ “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” This man woke up that morning a madman: naked, foul, enslaved, stench of death. He went to bed that night as a clothed, sent out missionary.

Jesus sent him home to tell people about him. Anything strike you about that? Not sent on great journey...but sent home. V 38, 39, he wanted to go with Jesus, but he was sent home, back to his community, to do local outreach. Why? Those who knew him most could see the biggest change in him. People are led to Jesus by seeing what he has done in and for us, as we build relationships and not only speak but live out the gospel before them—as people who seek to shine to make Jesus famous, not ourselves famous. Jesus sent this man with a story of salvation back to his own neighborhood, not around the world.

But so hard to “go home”. It can be painful to acknowledge those places where our lives have been touched by sin and death, but it is precisely in those tender places where Jesus is glorified the most. Where people can say the change in you didn’t come from yourself. It really calls us to be a people who are quick to repent because we are far more sinful than we ever imagined ourselves to be. But, in Christ, we are far more loved than we could ever dream. Do you let those who know you see you repent of the bad things you’ve done and see the light and forgiveness of Christ changing you? Those who see you day to day, neighbors, co workers, friends at the gym, all the relationships you have now. Can they see and can they hear you repent, turning to a Jesus who bled and died for you and for me because we just can’t get it right?

Yet, some of us are like loons. Little birds, similar to ducks, but they are fast. They often won’t let people close. Instead, they will dive underwater and swim for minutes at a time. Some people say they can dive to two hundred feet and will pop onto the surface hundreds of yards away from the nearest person, to a place of safety.

Some people are like loons, who dive into a mass of humanity, lost among the faces, hoping we not be noticed, or called upon to be vulnerable or bear witness to what God has done. Like a loon, swim away, hiding among the people.

But Jesus calls us not to dive and get away, but go home, tell what he has done. Go next door. Go across the street. Go local as a sent people. Why? Because Jesus has taken us from death to life. He has freed us from the prison of evil and sin and promises life eternal. His love is deep and his mercy wide. He has given each of us a story to tell, and he has made every one of us a missionary. So go home and build relationships for the King.