

## **SERMON: Sunday – 19 June 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

**Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.**

Galatians 3:23-29

Luke 8:26-39

What an amazing story of grace the healing of the demonic man by Jesus is. What an incredible example of the kingdom where people's lives are completely transformed. What a powerful testimony to the unity to be found in Christ, no longer Jew or Greek; no longer slave or free; no longer male and female, for all are one in Christ Jesus.

You would think that when people saw such things happening as the people of the Gerasenes did, that they would welcome it with open arms, that they would be begging Jesus to stick around and do even more, to go on to the next person and cast out the next demon, heal the next person and so on. But that's not what happened here.

We read that "When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they became frightened. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then the whole throng of people of the surrounding region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned".

They didn't like what they saw. They were frightened by the upset caused to their ways. They liked things to stay the way they were, the way they'd aye been.

They asked Jesus to leave and Jesus left. He didn't argue with them. He dint point us look at the good thing I've just done for this man, I could do so much more. No. He just left. He did what they asked of him.

The people of the Gerasenes liked things to stay the way they were, the way they'd aye been.

But leaving things the way they were wouldn't have benefited Legion, the poor, homeless, mentally ill man who'd been living in that state for years shunned by society, so much so that he took refuge in the graveyard. He was as good as dead.

Jesus looked upon people differently. To him, people were not as good as dead but sons and daughters of Abraham. This man belonged to God as much as any other. This man had a right to be treated with the same respect, dignity, care and compassion that any other man or woman would. This man was a human being with the potential to take his own unique place in the building of a better society for all.

And so Jesus started a revolution with the healing of one man in a place where he was asked then to leave. But the revolution had begun. The fire had been started, This wasn't going to fizzle out, even in sending Jesus away.

Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.

Jesus had put Legion's life back on track and given him the direction he needed. Jesus might well have been sent away but Legion was there to stay. The good news would carry on through him now.

You can understand the man wanting to stay at Jesus' feet where he would feel safe and secure, indebted to the one who'd saved him. But Jesus sees that what matter most is that Legion bears witness to what God in Christ has done. Legion would become a powerful witness of the Gospel of Grace. He would be able to carry on what Jesus had started. He would be the one to do what Jesus wasn't able to do because he'd be sent away.

People would see for themselves that Legion, who was once desolate and homeless, was now speaking joyfully about unconditional love and living in a manner which bears witness to a life transformed by God. They couldn't send Legion away as easily as they'd asked Jesus to leave.

Often, if not always, the best place for mission, is on one's own doorstep, where one knows the people, the culture, the territory; where there is evidence of transformation, before and after.

Do we see that level of transformation in the church? Sometimes. But sometimes perhaps it's not easy to see because we rarely see sudden change. Change comes much more gradually. But let me say that I think that change can be just as powerful and just as necessary.

Perhaps its the tiny, daily changes that hardly anyone ever sees that matter just as much; the tiny decisions to take time to listen to God, to pray when no one's watching, to phone someone who's lonely, to visit someone who's not well, to write to someone who likes getting letters, to remember someone in a quiet moment, to help a neighbour, to volunteer to help wherever there is a need. These little things can make a big impact when it comes to spreading the good infection, as C S Lewis called the Gospel.

Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you. Mission starts at home. In the home, with the neighbour and in the community. Spreading kindness is one sure way of declaring how much God has done for us. And yes it might well lead to the opportunity to tell our own story of transformation.

When was it that God helped us? How did that happen? What were we like before? How has our life been changed by encountering Christ?

But at least we must learn from Jesus who looked at legion as a son of Abraham so that we would consider all people as having been made in the image of God and begin there. How might our community engagement change if we remember this home truth about all people made to be part of God's image?

I read part of a report this week by the C of E called EQUIPPING PEOPLE TO START THEIR FAITH JOURNEY. Basically it can be summed up as

(SLIDE)

Every encounter is an opportunity to make a positive memory and encourage a faith journey

Many churches, including the C of S, have in recent times been encouraging a method developed by Michael Harvey called ACORN.

Acorn is a 5 step process with each step starting with the letter that makes up the word acorn. Here it is:

(SLIDE)

**A**sk – ‘Lord, is there anyone beyond the church You want me to connect with today?’

When God **C**alls and reveals a person for us to get alongside, we simply **O**bey and follow through by contacting them in any way appropriate.

We then just ask the person “How are you?” God is already there, with the other. Our job is to find out what God is doing and join God in that conversation. God then reveals deeper hurts, desires and opening for the Gospel.

Christians then frequently gather to disciple and encourage each other by;

**R**eporting what God has been doing in and through them, and by

**N**oticing together what God is up to and doing in the other person.

Christians are then encouraged to mentor other Christian friends in this way of life.

Martin Fair, Moderator Church of Scotland last year said, "What I love about ACORN is it is so simple. We don't need months of meetings. Just a little enthusiasm from a few and it could be up and running in any church."

It's just an idea. We know that people don't always fit into preconceived programs or methods. We don't think Jesus used such a method as such but we might recognise a similarity between this and the Jesus approach. So maybe there's something in this that we can adapt. And there's certainly plenty we have to learn from sitting at Jesus' feet that will help us in all our relationships and for us to tell of all that God has done for us.

Let's pray.

Lord,

Thank you for your amazing, unconditional grace;

That reaches the places that need your touch.

Help us to tell of all you have done, and are doing.

And as we engage with our families, friends and community, may we see in them what Jesus saw in people, the very image of God, and begin from that place of grace.

In Jesus name.

Amen.