

**SILENCE IS NO OPTION!**

**SERMON: June 20, 2010  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**Texts: Isaiah 65:1-9; Psalm 22:19-28; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39**

In our psalm for today we read these words: "I will declare your name to my people; in the midst of the assembly I will praise you." Today we continue to explore the imperative we have as Christians to give witness to what God has done and is doing for us in our lives.

There is a Vietnamese folktale that tells the story of a woman who called her cook early one morning and said, "Tonight, when my beloved visits, I want you to cook the food that has the most pleasant taste in the whole world." The cook quickly went to the market where he made his purchase. That night, after serving many appetizers, he announced, "The main dish tonight is tongue of pig." The woman was most surprised at the cook's choice and asked, "Why have you determined this to be the most pleasant taste in the world?" The cook replied, "When people love each other, their tongues say pleasant and loving things to each other. So is the tongue not the most pleasant thing in the whole world?" "You are not only a fine cook," the woman said, "you are also a philosopher."

The next day the woman again approached the cook, "Last night my beloved and I found your choice the most interesting. This evening we would like you to prepare the most unpleasant thing in the whole world." Once again the cook made his way to the market to make a purchase. That evening he again served a variety of small dishes before announcing, "The main course this evening is tongue of pig." Both the woman and her beloved expressed surprise at the choice and so the cook explained, "When people hate each other their tongues say the most unpleasant things to each other. Is the tongue not the most unpleasant thing in the whole world?"

This Vietnamese story has a simple wisdom. The tongue can be a powerful tool in our relationships with others. We can choose, by using our tongue or voice, to say pleasant things or say unpleasant things. Our voices can lift another person up or we can tear another person down. We can use our tongues to give praise to give praise to God or utter curse God. As Christians are asked to use our voices, not only in praise of God, but also to tell the story of how God has graced our lives.

In our gospel lesson for today we meet a most unpleasant creature, described to us as a Gerasene, a region outside of Galilee. Actually, unpleasant doesn't quite describe the terror this man instilled in the lives of those unfortunate enough to cross his path. He was known for his bouts with bizarre behavior; screaming at anything and everything and sometimes attacking without warning.

The physicians had no explanation for his behavior. They could find no physical cause for what afflicted him though doctors today might call it schizophrenia or multiple personalities. The religious leaders, however, said he was possessed by many demons. It was the demons inside of him who created his bizarre behavior. Their presence also made him ritualistically unclean. All agreed that it was best that this man be left alone.

But into the life of this man Geresene comes Jesus. He travels by boat from region of Galilee to the region of the Geresenes. As Jesus steps out of the boat he is confronted by this man. The man bows down before Jesus and one of the voices, speaks from inside of him, "What have you to do with me, Son of the Most High God? I beg you not to torment me." It is not clear as to what this voice means by this plea not to be tormented. What is clear, however, are two things. The first is that the man desperately wants to be healed by Jesus. The second is that those things that possess him just as desperately want to hang on to him.

Jesus commands the unclean spirit to come out of the man. Then he asks the man his name. The response is that his name is "Legion." This response makes it clear that there are many demons that possess this man. They beg Jesus not to order them to go back into the abyss, nor to send them back to the place of darkness and death.

Yet Jesus has no compassion on the demons. It is this man's life that he seeks to restore back into a relationship with God. He orders the demons to leave the man and they do. In a strange twist to the story, they enter into a herd of pigs, which then rush down a steep bank into the lake and drown. If nothing else, this portion of the story involving the pigs serves to show just how many demons possessed this man.

The story of the pigs also serves another purpose. For it introduces us to the swineherds who are witnesses to what has happened. They do not understand it and in fact, it probably frightens and angers them. But they go running off to tell the other Geresenes, who then come to find out what has happened. When they see Jesus and the formerly possessed man sitting there, they are afraid. They are not at all sure that the man has changed. They fear for their own safety as well as the safety of Jesus. And when Jesus tells them that the man has been healed, their response is to ask Jesus.

Now, you might assume that the healing of this man would be good news to them. They need not fear his outbursts any longer. And yet, they do not trust it. Is it merely the calm before the storm, will the man revert back to his former self? Or does this stranger named Jesus have the power to drive the demons out, what other power does he have? What might he change within them? What is the source of this power? Is it good, or is it evil?

So, we are told, they are seized with great fear. And this is somewhat ironic, for the words seized with and possessed by are very similar. Even as the man is freed up from those things that possessed him, the others remain seized by their fears. They may be less afraid of the powers that possessed the man. But they are even more afraid of the powers possessed by Jesus. So they ask him to leave.

As Jesus prepares to enter the boat for his return journey across the lake, the man who has been healed begs to stay with Jesus. Now that he has been given back his life, he now seeks to spend the rest of his life in silent devotion to the one who healed him. He is willing to follow Jesus anywhere and everywhere.

But Jesus sends him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." The man who spent all of his life until this point as a witness to the powers of evil now is asked to spend the rest of his life as a witness to the even greater powers of God's love and grace. The passage ends with these words, "so he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him."

When we download this sermon onto our website, I will title this sermon, "Silence is no option." I chose that title because it underlines the point I hope to make this morning about our relationship to Jesus. I believe that there are two things that motivate us to come to worship on any given Sunday morning. We are either here because we have had an experience of God's grace in our lives, an experience that has moved us to prayer and praise. Or we are here because we desire to have such an experience. And the truth probably is that we move back and forth between the two motivating forces. Sometimes we are seized by the power of the grace of God. Sometimes we are seized by the powers the personal demons that afflict our lives.

In both circumstances, we have a story to tell. On one hand there is the story of how our lives need to be changed. On the other hand there is the story of how our lives have been changed. Again, silence is no real option.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus says to his disciples: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The strength of the Christian church, throughout its history, has been its ability to tell the story. Over and over again, people of faith have found the way to tell their story. This story has been shared through words, through songs, through poetry, through dance, through pictures, and through actions. This story, no matter its form, has one basic theme: God's love has the power to change our lives.

Consider, for a moment, all of those persons (children and adults) in our congregation and in our neighborhood need to hear the story. Who will tell them the story? Who will show them God's love? Who will help to change their lives by sharing the power of God's love?

You will hear me say over and over again, over the next several weeks and months, that I believe that if we are to be faithful to God's great commission to share the good news, then we must begin within our own neighborhood. And I also believe that each one of you can play a part in this mission. No matter how old you think you are, no matter how young, you each have a story to share. And so I hope and pray that every one of you will choose, not to be silent, but to find some way to share your story.

For the ministry we are called to be and do, THANKS BE TO GOD!