

It Doesn't Have To Be That Way

Luke 8:26-39

The beginning of our lesson today reads like a horror-story. Jesus and His disciples have just come through a storm on the Sea of Galilee. It's nighttime and they're thrilled to have survived the storm and now stand on solid ground.

But, as they get out of the boat, they're caught up in a different kind of storm. They hear strange sounds coming from the tombs... shrieks, growls, screams, moans, the rattling of chains. Then, suddenly, a horrifying sight. A madman with tattered clothes, bruised, dirty, bloody and battered with pieces of chains dangling from his arms and ankles, comes running directly toward them!

What would you have done in that situation? I think I would have run for my life... or jumped back in the boat.

But not Christ! Jesus stands His ground and squares off against the madman. Undaunted, unafraid... Jesus stands there and takes this madman on. He heals him, and brings peace to his troubled soul. He changes him, cleanses him and turns his life around. Jesus did this for the man in our lesson. He can do that for us.

Let's take a few moments this morning and underscore the importance of this lesson by lifting three ideas out of this great story that you and I need to hear today.

First of all...you don't have to be at war with yourself. It doesn't have to be that way. Notice here in Luke 8 that the Gerasene demoniac, this madman, was at war with himself. He was hurting himself, bruising himself, injuring himself. How often we do that! As Pogo put it: "We have met the enemy and he is us!"

One day a young father was shopping in a crowded super-market. His three-year old son was with him. The little boy was riding in the grocery cart... and he was misbehaving terribly and causing all kinds of problems.

Every time the father would put something into the cart, the little boy would grab it and throw it out. If the cart went close to the shelves, the three-year old boy would just rake stuff off onto the floor. At one point, the little boy crawled out of the cart and ran down the aisle (knocking over every display he could get his hands on) with his father in hot pursuit.

People who were in the store at the time could hear the father saying out loud over and over, "Just be patient, Tommy. It won't be much longer Tommy. It'll be O.K., Tommy. Be calm, Tommy. Hang in there, Tommy."

Finally, a distinguished looking woman came up to the man and she said: "I just want to compliment you. I've been watching you and I want you to know that I admire you and the remarkable patience you have with little Tommy."

"Thank you, mam," the man said. "But my sons name is Michael. I'm Tommy!"

Well, that's a smart man! He was right to start with himself. If we're going to set a problem right, we have to get ourselves set right first.

When we're at war with ourselves, it smudges and distorts every relationship. On the other hand, when we feel good about ourselves, we're more loving, more patient, more thoughtful, more gracious... toward everyone we see.

If you find you are at war with yourself, remember this: "You are special to God, and are valuable to Him, for He has claimed you as His child!"

You don't have to be at war with yourself.... It doesn't have to be that way. You are special to God and that makes you supremely valuable.

Secondly, you don't have to be at war with other people. It doesn't have to be that way. In Luke 8, Legion, the madman, was very much at war with other people. He'd been cast out of society... chained, shackled, exiled to the tombs, constantly doing battle with other people. In our lesson he runs toward Jesus looking for a fight. It's amazing how crossways and estranged and hostile people can get!

20/20 did a program called "Neighbors at War"... showing how next-door neighbors battle one another, fight one another, fuss at one another, sue one another, and sometimes even shoot one another because of a barking dog, a noisy power tool or a bouncing basketball.

When will we ever learn? When will we ever strive to befriend one another, to respect one another, to love one another?

Perhaps you've heard this true story about a young man from a wealthy family who was about to graduate from high school. It was the custom in that affluent neighborhood for the parents to give the graduate an automobile.

"Bill" and his father had spent months looking at cars... and the week before graduation they found the perfect car. Bill was certain that on graduation night that car would be his.

After the graduation ceremonies, Bill's father handed him a gift-wrapped Bible! Bill was so furious that he threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house. He and his father never spoke again, never saw each other again. His parents tried to reach him, but Bill refused to speak to them or see them... or read their letters.

When his father died, Bill came home. One night, as he sat and went through his father's possessions, he came across the Bible his father had given him for graduation.

Bill brushed away the dust and opened it to find a cashier's check...dated the day of his graduation – in the exact amount of the car they had chosen together!

Sad, isn't it? And tragic. We don't have to be at war with other people. It doesn't have to be that way!

And finally, you don't have to be at war with God. It doesn't have to be that way. In Luke 8, Legion is also cut off from God. "What have you to do with me? Don't torment me," he says to Jesus.

Carl Michalson, a brilliant young theologian who died in a plane crash some years ago, told about playing with his young son one afternoon. They were tussling playfully on their front lawn when Dr. Michalson accidentally hit the young boy in the face with his elbow.

It was a sharp blow full to his son's face. The little boy was stunned by the impact of the elbow. It hurt... and he was just about to burst into tears. But then, he looked into his father's eyes and instead of anger or hostility, he saw there his father's sympathy and concern; he saw there his father's love and compassion.

Then, instead of exploding into tears, the little boy burst into laughter. What he saw in his father's eyes... made all the difference!

This is one of the reasons Jesus is so important to us. Through Him we see into our Father's eyes! When we look toward Jesus we see what God is like and what God wants us to be like!

Jesus shows us the love, compassion, concern and empathy of God – so that we don't need to be at war with Him. The good news of our faith teaches us that God looks at us not with angry, vengeful, condemning eyes, but with the eyes of love.

So, we don't have to be at war with ourselves, we don't have to be at war with other people, and we don't have to be at war with God. Jesus comes into our lives, just as He came into Legion's life, saying: "It doesn't have to that way!"