

TEN

The Home Is Where We Share Good News

(Mark 5:8–20)



For he had said to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, “Send us into the swine; let us enter them.” So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man

who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. *But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you."* And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

THIS STORY HAS ALL THE ELEMENTS OF A STEPHEN KING NOVEL. OF ALL THE stories in the Gospels I believe that this is one of the most frightening. After almost being drowned in a raging storm, the disciples find themselves on the "other side" of the Sea of Galilee. The other side is the scary side, the Gentile side. The first person they encounter is a possessed demoniac living among the tombs, his body bruised from harming himself with stones, and on top of all that he cries out in a loud voice day and night. He identifies himself as Legion, which signifies that he is possessed by five thousand demons. Welcome to life with Jesus.

This is a miracle story that is both frightful and sad. It's sad for the fact that when Jesus asks the man's name, he doesn't answer with his birth name given by his parents, but refers to himself by way of his condition, Legion, for there were many demons that afflicted him. This man clearly has an identity problem. Yet Jesus stands toe to toe with him and the encounter will forever change the possessed man's life. It will also change those in his town and more importantly, his family and his home.

Imagine the disciples huddled together behind Jesus ready to make a beeline for the boat! Imagine Peter gradually stepping backward, inch by inch, slowly untying the rope that anchored down the boat. I can see Peter signaling to James and John with a nod of his head, "Let's get out of here!" Life with Jesus is not always predictable but one can be sure that it is always exciting.

Jesus is not afraid to confront this man, for he too is a child

of God. Confused and possessed as he is, he is not his affliction. Jesus sees beyond this man's difficulties and views him as a beloved of the Father.

How are you like this possessed man? What shackles and chains hold you down? How many people in your culture lash out against society and define themselves by their problems and afflictions? How do you identify yourself? Your true identity is not as a doctor, teacher, author, victim, patient or prisoner but rather as a child of God. By virtue of your baptism you have been set free from the chains of sin and slavery. Those other identities in which the world places so much value on may be things you *do*, but they are not ultimately who you *are*.

Jesus commands the unclean spirits to enter the swine, and then they all rush down a steep bank and drown in the sea. Again, imagine those disciples looking at each other and wondering what the heck they have gotten themselves into. The swine drowned in the sea, and the man was set free. The townspeople came out to see and examine him, to see if what they had heard had really happened. If what the swine herders had reported was correct, it would make sense that they were in fear, and rightfully so.

This formerly possessed man had the desire to remain with Jesus; he pleaded with Jesus to remain with him, but Jesus, for some reason, would not permit it. The man's desire to follow Jesus *then and there* is certainly one model of discipleship, but Jesus had other plans for this man. Following Jesus demands an attentive ear and heart to listen to what Jesus wants us to do and

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“FAMILY IS NOT JUST ONE ‘COMPARTMENT IN OUR LIFE’; THE FAMILY IS THE INTEGRATING AND EVER PRESENT REALITY. TOUCH A PERSON AND YOU TOUCH A FAMILY.”

—Reverend Harold Drexler¹¹

not necessarily what we may want to do for Jesus. "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." The man did as Jesus had told him. He began to proclaim what Jesus had done for him beginning in his home.

In our desire to share the Good News of Jesus and how our lives have been set free, we may set out with good intentions while not necessarily being attentive to what the Holy Spirit may be calling us to do. It can be frustrating to have this desire that seeks to express faith but no clear path in which to do so. Saint Ignatius spoke about the discernment of spirits, in which a person listens attentively to what and where God may be calling him. There are many tools that the church offers us in discerning our path. We should not be discouraged by failures born out of our enthusiasm for God, but we should use them and the counsel of others to discern our true call. Unfortunately, without this discernment, we may be drawing more attention to ourselves and our efforts rather than to God. We may fall for the allure of success in the eyes of others rather than being faithful to what God has planned for us.

Imagine the joy and relief of the healed man's mother and father, brothers and sisters, grandparents, children, friends and neighbors! He was lost and now is found. In Jesus' eyes his value never changed regardless of his possession. He knows who he is after his encounter with Jesus, and he joyfully goes and tells the Good News to his own people in the Decapolis. We can only imagine the fruit that his witness bore in the lives of others. I would have loved to have been present when he shared his story with others.

Jesus' command to the possessed man is one that may challenge us today especially when it comes to missionary work. Evangelization, the sharing of the gospel by word and deed,

begins at home. It begins by sharing the good news in a way that your community understands. If you can't share the gospel with those you know and live with, how can you expect to share it abroad? If you think that a rejection of home is the Christian way, reread this story.

Evangelization is the very reason that the church exists, to proclaim the gospel. Some may say that the word "evangelization" sounds too Protestant. If this is the case, you may have a misunderstanding about who we are called to be as Catholics. If we don't speak up, who will? Faith comes by hearing the word of God. We must speak up and proclaim the gospel beginning in our homes. If we do not begin at home guess where our children will turn? To the world, materialism, consumerism, self-indulgence or to other churches that may not be proclaiming the gospel. Evangelization is an ongoing task for all Catholics. We need to be renewed ourselves in order to go out to proclaim the Good News.

What did this man say to his family? It was pretty simple I suspect. "Here was my situation: I was afflicted, an outcast, I didn't even know who I was. Jesus came into my life and changed that. I've decided to learn more about him and follow his way of reaching out to others. It's pretty simple, really."

Do you hesitate to tell your story? Do you know that you even have one? Have you ever written it down? What are you afraid of? Like the person who sows seed in the Parable of the Sower, who sows the seeds in unexpected places, places one would expect little or no growth, we need to be attentive to the Holy Spirit to share our faith with those "unexpected" people. The results may be astonishing! Jesus was willing to live a short life, but it was a life filled with meaning and purpose. The sharing of your life story and of how God entered in is the strongest testimony we have. Don't keep it to yourself. Saint Peter reminds us to always

be ready to share the Good News. Saint Francis reportedly said, “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.” Father Thomas A. Judge reminds us to be good, do good and to be a power for good. We have some good role models to follow.

In the home, Jesus commanded the possessed man to tell his story of what God did for him. It’s never too late to share that Good News with your family, in *your* home. That sharing will bear fruit in your children. In turn they will bear fruit in people and homes that you may never be aware of.

PRAYER

Jesus, companion to those who are lost and possessed, send forth your Holy Spirit to your faithful disciples. Inspire us to reach out in love to those who are far from you, especially to those people whom we might not expect to respond to you. May we communicate your message of love and freedom in ways they can identify with. Give us wisdom and fortitude to reach out and not be afraid of strange and difficult situations or people because we know that you go before us. Let us never retreat from the church’s mission to bear witness to your saving love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think of a situation that frightened you recently. How did you react?
2. Have you ever heard someone witness and explain what Jesus has done in her life? How did you react to her testimony?
3. How did this man’s life-changing encounter with Jesus have a far-reaching impact?
4. What would you say if you were called on to let people know what God has done in your life?

CHAPTER CHALLENGES

- I will step out of my comfort zone and reach out to someone who is different from me or whom I've never talked to before.
- I will begin a daily devotional or family prayer and allow time for the family to share when its witnessed God's presence during the day.
- I will be bold in my prayer life like Jesus and pray in the power of the Holy Spirit for those who are oppressed and possessed.

The Home Experiences Loss and Life

(Mark 5:35–43)



While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. *When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.* When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

THIS AND THE OTHER VERSIONS OF THIS MIRACLE STORY, RECORDED IN Matthew and Luke, all mention that people laughed at Jesus. Not in the sense that Jesus was humorous, but in the sense that he was a fool. He put them *all* outside. No messing around with Jesus in this life-and-death situation. I wonder why the crowd, in the presence of the mother and father, turned their tears and wailing so quickly to jeers and laughter. I certainly find it reasonable to question their sincerity in light of the agony the parents were going through, grieving over the loss of their only daughter. Jesus knew what to do and did it with authority; he put them outside.

Home is where suffering exists for many people. Long, winding driveways, leading up to beautifully landscaped lawns and decorative houses can easily fool outsiders from the pain, loneliness and sickness within. Less extravagant houses are also not immune from abuse, sickness and death. We may want to hide the pain from the outside world and give the impression that all is well. We may be tempted to close ourselves off from family, friends and even God. Yet, here, in this story, Jesus is not afraid to enter in and get involved.

Home is also a place where we care for those family members who are not well. Patients often feel better as long as they are home, knowing that they will be cared for. The elderly often fare much better when nursing homes accent the *home* aspect over the *nursing* aspect of the facility.

This is one such story where there is real turmoil and suffering for not only the young girl and her parents but also the extended family and the village. For when one family member suffers, we all suffer to some degree. Certainly this child's father has focused his thoughts and attention on his daughter, his wife and someone who can help. No words can describe the suffering of a parent who is in this position. The mother of the little girl in

this story remains silent. What words could she have spoken to describe her pain? No words escape her lips, but we can imagine the tears that must have flowed down her cheeks and soaked the bedsheets where her daughter lay.

It is into this home that Jesus enters; a home where suffering and death is tangled up in loud wailing turmoil, commotion and unseemly laughter. Jesus put the scoffers outside. He enters the home with the family and his disciples, takes the child by the hand and says to her, "Little girl, get up!" She got up, walked and ate. A family restored by the loving touch and words of Jesus. What a difference the presence of Jesus made in that home experiencing sickness and suffering.

Unfortunately, not all of our stories end that way. Death is still an ever-present reality of our lives. It touches everyone, even those with great faith. This little girl eventually did die, as we all will. Jesus' touch points to an even greater reality, namely, by his cross and resurrection the faithful will "get up" and be born to eternal life. So what are we to make of this story in which Jesus enters a home where there is death, raises a little girl to life and restores a family to health?

The phrase that strikes me the most is: "He put them outside." Jesus miraculously heals an older woman in the midst of the commotion immediately before this healing, so we know he will do it anywhere. Yet Jesus often does his healing one on one, apart from the crowds, as in the case of the blind man whom Jesus calls aside to minister to alone. (We will see the apostles healing like Jesus healed in the Acts of the Apostles; as Jesus did, so did they do.)

What are the distractions in our lives that prevent us from experiencing the healing presence of God? What are the voices of doubt and diversion that cause us to doubt God's presence and providence in the midst of suffering and pain? Do we need to take

"I CAN THINK OF SOMETHING THAT I'LL NEVER FORGET WHEN MY GRANDFATHER PASSED. I THINK EVEN THOUGH HE WAS EIGHTY-FIVE YEARS OLD AND LIVED A FULL LIFE, THE DAY HE PASSED AWAY CHANGED ME AS A PERSON SIGNIFICANTLY. I WAS AT HOME TALKING TO MY MOM ABOUT HOW ANGRY I WAS AND HOW I PRAYED AND PRAYED TO GOD TO MAKE HIM BETTER. I ASKED HER, 'HOW COME EVERY TIME I PRAY GOD DOES THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT I ASK?' I REMEMBER SHE SAID TO ME THAT GOD DID WHAT SHE HAD PRAYED FOR, THE TIMES I WAS PRAYING FOR HIM TO GET BETTER, MY MOM WAS PRAYING FOR GOD TO TAKE HIM TO HIMSELF, BECAUSE HE WAS NO LONGER LIVING A LIFE MY GRANDFATHER WOULD WANT TO BE LIVING.

"I THINK BACK NOW AND I KNOW WAS PRAYING FOR HIM TO GET BETTER FOR MYSELF BECAUSE I COULDN'T HANDLE THE THOUGHT OF HIM LEAVING. I WAS SELFISH IN THINKING THAT HE WOULD BE ALL RIGHT LIVING HIS LIFE IN THE HOSPITAL, JUST AS LONG AS I COULD SEE HIM THINGS WOULD BE FINE. I ALSO NEEDED TO REALIZE THAT THESE DECISIONS ARE NOT UP TO ME AND THAT DEATH IS PART OF LIFE. I GOT ANGRY WITH GOD BECAUSE HE WASN'T DOING SOMETHING THAT WOULD MAKE ME HAPPY. HE DID SOMETHING TO MAKE MY GRANDFATHER HAPPY... GIVING HIM PEACE AND ETERNAL LIFE."

—Melissa Dobbin¹²

time apart from the commotion and listen to God's affirming voice and surround ourselves with the affirming voices of others? Do we, like Jesus, need to put those negative voices out of our life in order to listen to the Holy Spirit speak to us?

Personally, I know that I do better in almost everything I try when there are affirming people supporting and encouraging me.