

INTRODUCTION TO READING: Luke 8:26-39

The setting, as stated in the text, is “the country of the Gerasenes which is opposite Galilee.” Scholars are not sure of the exact location or name of this place, but it would be somewhere on the far side of Galilee. In Luke’s account it represents a strange and alien land, somewhere beyond the geography and culture of the ancient Jewish people of God. Swine herding and pork eating would have represented uncleanness. The tombs of the dead would also be considered places of defilement.

But Luke shows Jesus stepping beyond geography and culture and ritual to express his redeeming love for an individual who has lived an awful life of torment by all kinds of destructive powers.

SERMON:

It’s oft been said; “There’s no place like home.” It’s great to get away from time to time, but it’s always good to come back home. It’s good to be able to return to where you experience true belonging; where you feel safe; where your essential relationships and affections are; where your primary responsibilities are. Home.

A few weeks ago my daughter and son-in-law moved from their apartment to their newly purchased home. They had lots of young friends to help do the heavy lifting so my wife and I decided that our best help would be to bring our three year old grandson here while they moved. He was with us for a week and a half. It was the first time he had been away from home so we tried to do some exciting things to keep him occupied and less likely to be homesick.

The first morning, there happened to be two great big orange trucks on the road in front of the house with cherry pickers raised high in the air as the workers trimmed the trees around the power lines. What is it about little boys and big trucks? The man in the cherry picker saw our grandson and waved and called down to him. What a great start to the day.

Late afternoon I took him to the elementary school playground. He thought he was at Disneyworld! On the way home we stopped at the fire station to see the trucks. He sat in the driver’s seat of the biggest red fire truck. One of the firefighters there let him look through an infrared camera and he could see his grandpa in the dark. She took him into the back of the ambulance to see all the buttons and apparatus. It was a great day!

That evening after supper, my wife got him bathed and into his pajamas and read him a story. As she tucked him into bed he started to cry a little bit and said, “Grandma, I need to go home now.”

The sense of home and belonging is something that we begin to experience at a very early age and it never leaves us.

I think of our military personnel who are far away, engaged in determined service and committed to their orders. Yet, I am sure, their thoughts are continually returning to their families and friends and communities and responsibilities here, and longing for the day they will return to their homes.

The young man we call prodigal left home and went to a far country to live a reckless life. It was exciting for a time, but ultimately not what at all what he had hoped for. He ended up living with the pigs and vying with them for their food. But he came to his senses, and said, “I need to go home now.” “I will rise and go to my father”. And he returned home. Robert Frost said, “Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” You will recall the father’s loving reception.

There was another man who had no home... unless you call living in tombs a home. This was before bridge abutments and steam grates on city sidewalks. He was naked... naked in every sense. His life was completely stripped of every sense of identity and belonging. If he had a name, we don’t know it. He had no home, no clothes, no relationships, no support, and no freedom. He was kept under guard and chained, perhaps to protect himself, but more likely to protect everyone else. He was tormented by all sorts of destructive demonic powers.

But he met Jesus and was healed of his torment. He is now found sitting at the feet of Jesus (the posture of an alert student), clothed, and in his right mind. It's a complete turnaround. It's a story of God's life changing grace.

So now, this man begs to go with Jesus. He wants to join Jesus as he travels from town to town. It's not surprising when you think about it. Where else can he go? Back to the tombs? He has no identity to fall back on. No references or relationships. No skills. He has been denied a normal life and relationship for so long. He has no claims. So it would seem his best and only option is to go along with Jesus, wherever that might take him.

But Jesus' response is surprising and seems quite strange. "No", he says, "Go home." Jesus sends him away saying, "Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you." Strange. Jesus, who calls so many others to leave everything to follow him, says to this man, "Go home."

Stranger yet, Jesus says, "Return to your home" to a homeless man! How do you tell a homeless man to go back home? What gives?

Let me draw a couple thoughts that might bring a little meaning to what seems so strange.

It seems to me there might be a kind of declaration implicit in what Jesus says. I wonder if Jesus is implying something like this. "You can now be home. You belong now. You can live a new life. You have an identity and a sense of being and belonging. You have a home now; not in tombs. You have a life now; not in chains"... just like the psalmist David said in Psalm 68, "God gives the homeless a home and leads prisoners to freedom."

So Jesus may be saying, "You are now made whole and restored to life in all its fullness. So live. Be at home in your new life. Be at home with God, with yourself and with your people, in your relationships and responsibilities. Be at home in your place of belonging. Return to your true home. You were lost, but now found. Go on... home"

What a wonderful declaration! What a wonderful affirmation!

But Jesus' words are also a directive. "Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you." Go home to where you belong and tell everyone there what God has done and how he has changed your life. Show yourself there and tell them all about it. You have a story to tell. Go home and tell it there. Let that be your first place of witness. Live your life there. Share with them the grace of Christ. Tell them about your healing. Be a living witness at home, where you belong; where your security is; where your essential relationships and affections are; where your primary responsibilities are.

It's a good word for all of us. If God has done good things for you, show it and tell it and live it out with those around you who know you. Don't think you must rush off on a mission trip or write a book or find a public venue for your story.

People whose lives have been disgraced often feel they must go away to some place where no one knows them, in order to carve out a new life for themselves. But Jesus is saying, "No, you have not been disgraced. You have been graced. Don't run off. Go home to the place where everyone does know you and tell them about the love and grace of God and how Jesus Christ has changed your life. Live out your new life in their presence. That's where you belong.

We've heard too often of prominent public ministers who have failed badly in their homes and private lives. It can be an easy temptation for some to want some more impressive and exciting and prominent role, thinking, "If I could be like her, or do as he does." God may indeed call some of us to serve in prominent ways out there beyond our own homes and communities and schools and places of work. But never will God call us to a life inconsistent with our home life. Home is where our real lives are lived.

So Jesus might say to us, "Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you."

When it comes to really living an authentic Christian life, there's no place like home. Go on... home.