

Sermon- Pentecost 18, C October 13th, 2019
Campus Lutheran Church, Columbia, MO
Title: Red Letter Challenge- "Going"
Text: Luke 8:26-28, 30, 32-33, 38-39 Rev. Dr. David Benson

It's exciting for Jan and me to be back in Columbia and here at Campus Lutheran Church this weekend. It truly is a homecoming for us. And, I count it a great privilege to be able to bring God's Word to you today in this special service.

First of all, I want to commend you for so wholeheartedly engaging in the Red Letter Challenge Bible study series. In your personal devotions and small group studies you've examined the words of our Lord Jesus as they speak to the issues of Being, Forgiving, Serving, and Giving. Now, today, we introduce the topic of Going!

We are a culture that is on-the-go. Express Lanes at the grocery store ("15 items or less please"); High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes on the freeways; TSA Pre-Check at the airport; and Drive-Through, just about anything, from Starbucks to dry cleaning. We are people on the go, moving from one place to the next as fast as possible.

As Christians, one of the things that Jesus calls us to be is people who are "on-the-go" for Him. In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus and His disciples sailed to the region of the (Jer-a-seens) Gerasenes which is directly across the lake from Galilee. The Gerasenes is in a region known as the Decapolis, which is a Greek word meaning, "Ten Cities."

Tradition says that these were ten cities that the pagan Canaanites settled in when Joshua and the Israelites drove them out of the Promised Land. This was a pagan land. In this land, the Canaanites would practice things like child sacrifice. Isaiah chapter 65, verse 4, actually describes the kind of pagan worship that would go on in this region at that time. These people would be..."sitting among the graves, spending nights in secret places, eating the meat of pigs, and putting polluted broth in their bowls." This was, evidently, part of their sacrifices to their gods, which, would have been abominable to any Jew. But this becomes important when Jesus lands in this region.

When He got out on land, a demon-possessed man from the town met Him. For a long time this man had worn no clothing and he did not stay in a house, but in the tombs. When Jesus got to the Decapolis, one man met him. He was strange. He lived among the tombs, just like the pagans of Isaiah 65. And he was demon-possessed.

Now before I go on, and even though it is not the focus of this message today, I think I need to say something about the reality of Satan, demons, and evil powers. In our scientific world we tend to dismiss the devil and demons as the imaginary beings of a primitive, superstitious society. But Jesus and the Holy Scriptures don't treat them that way. They are not just psychological manifestations of our deepest fears and anxieties.

Former atheist, but later Christian apologist, C. S. Lewis, wrote: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them." Demons do exist and they are still at work in our world today. They are not responsible for all the evil that exists, our collective sinful human nature is the major culprit, but Satan and his fallen angels are still wreaking havoc all around us. It appears that they are working the hardest in Washington D. C. today.

So, we need to recognize and understand that there is a divide in this world with which we may not be comfortable, but we nevertheless need to wrestle with. Just like there were only two teams playing in yesterday's football game, there are only two teams in the spiritual realm: team Jesus and team NOT-Jesus. There is no middle way! Jesus said... "Anyone who is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30). This is why it is so important that we go! Because we do live in a world with a lot of lostness and a lot of pain and a lot of despair! Satan is hard at work in this world! He is going against us and the people around us!

When the demon possessed man saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and said in a loud voice, "What do You have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, don't torment me!" "What is your name?" Jesus asked him. "Legion," he said, because many demons had entered him.

A large herd of pigs was there, feeding on the hillside. The demons begged Him to permit them to enter the pigs, and He gave them permission. 33 The demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned (Luke 8:28-33).

Jesus goes head to head with these demons and He wins. He goes to head to head with false religion and He wins. Because part of the worship in this area was the sacrifice of pigs and so Jesus gets rid of the pigs! He gets rid of the false worship. Why? Because He wants this man – He wants all people – to worship Him. “Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.” In the ancient world, syncretism was common. If they heard a new message about a new god, they would simply add that god to the gods they already had. But Jesus says, “I’m not an addition, I’m a replacement!” This is also true for us. Jesus is not an add on to our life, He is our life! This can be tough. Because we tend to add Jesus on when it’s convenient: - When we’re in pain, we add Jesus - When finances are tight, we add Jesus - When we feel lost, we add Jesus: But Jesus is not a condiment, He’s the main course. And this man now knew this to be true.

The man from whom the demons had departed begged Jesus to leave the (Jer-a-seens) Gerasenes and allow him to travel with the disciples. But Jesus sent him away and said, “Return home, and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him (Luke 8:38-39). This man wanted to be with Jesus! And that’s a good thing. That’s the call of discipleship: to be with Jesus. But Jesus had something else in mind. He wanted this man to GO for Him. Jesus wanted this man to take his deliverance and share it with the world. And, that’s what He wants us to do as well. We are called to be witnesses of what Jesus has done for us.

Witnessing, telling the Good News about Jesus, is our **mission**. At the end of Matthew’s Gospel Jesus says to His disciples then, and to us now, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” This is not just the task of full-time missionaries, or pastors, or other professional church workers. **Witnessing is the mission of every single Christian alive.** And, it’s our collective mission: we are to work together as we go and tell the world about our Savior and King.

So, how do we go? First, we go transparently. (You are to be who you are.) One of the biggest fears people have about going to share their faith is that they won’t know what to say. Jesus didn’t send this man out as theologian with all the answers. He sent him out as one who had a personal encounter with Jesus. “Go back to your home, and tell all that God has done for you.”

You and I don’t have to have all the answers and we don’t have to pretend to have it all together. This man’s story was that he was demon-possessed and now he is free. The Apostle Paul’s story was that he persecuted Christians, but was converted by a personal appearance of Jesus, and goes on to plant churches. It’s okay to share what Jesus has done for you in your brokenness. You don’t have to be perfect. Everyone knows that’s not true anyway!

Second, we go locally. (Do what you can, now, where you are.) The formally demon possessed man went proclaiming throughout his home town how much Jesus had done for him. When people think of sharing the gospel, they often envision going to some far-away place. But, we need to start where we are: in our neighborhood, at our work place, in our school, on social media, or wherever we find ourselves on a typical day. Perhaps someday God will call you out from your locality, but it’s good to start where you are before you go to where you are not. At His Ascension Jesus said: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Keep the order in order!

Finally, we go consistently. (Just keep going.) Do you remember the account of Jesus feeding the 5,000+ people in Bethsaida of Galilee? We’ll, later there’s another feeding Jesus does, of a crowd of over 4,000 people, guess where? Back in the Decapolis. It’s not quite 5,000 like in Israel. But 4,000 for the Decapolis is pretty good. And, I wonder where all these people heard about Jesus? The last time Jesus was in the Decapolis, only one man was there to meet Him. Now there are over 4,000! There is power in witness! You may never know what impact your words have on the people around you. But you and the Holy Spirit are unstoppable! So, let’s get going, for Jesus sake, Amen!