

Sermon: Mission Festival Pietermaritzburg - FELSISA

Text: Mark 5: 18-20

Theme: Go and Tell

Goal: Jesus drives out the evil spirits from us so that we might
proclaim His wonders to all.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: The background of our text is the healing of a demon-possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes. An important detail of this story is that it was a Gentile region within the Jewish territory. We can affirm this because Jews don't eat pork; and those people had a huge herd of pigs, about two thousand! Jesus crossed the Lake of Galilee to that region just to perform this specific miracle. He was not accepted by the local people, who asked Him to leave their region. But the seed had been sown: One missionary remained in that place, proclaiming God's wonders in his life and the love of God in Jesus Christ to all!

I – Jesus faces the devil on our behalf

Jesus had healed several demon-possessed people. But this case was a very special one. It happened in a pure mission field, and not in a synagogue or among faithful Jews. It was not only one evil spirit, but a great number of them, Legion as one of them identified themselves to Jesus. Jesus granted the request of the evil spirits to go into the herd of pigs. And Jesus didn't allow the healed man to follow Him, but sent him back to his family and friends to testify them about the love and grace of God that he had experienced.

What amazes me is the fact that the evil spirits recognized very clearly who Jesus was. It is very seldom that we have such a big and clear confession about Jesus. The demon-possessed man, guided by the evil spirits, ran in the direction of Jesus when Jesus arrived, fell on his knees in front of Jesus, and shouted at the top of his voice: “What do you want

with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God?” - Even if the Jews and the established church didn't recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah, the devil exactly knew at that time and knows today who He was and who He is, and is frightened in His presence. Jesus had entered, had invaded the territory of the devil, and the evil spirit felt that he was weak to face Jesus.

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work”, wrote John in his first letter (1 John 3:8). What we hear in this story is just one segment of the fight between the seed of the woman and the offspring of the serpent, as prophesied in Genesis 3:15. The death of Christ on the cross and His consequent resurrection is the big victory of Christ over the power of the devil.

II – Jesus offers His victory to us

We all need Jesus' victory over the devil. We were all born demon-possessed, far from God and condemned. Have you ever realized this? Or do you think you are better than that demon-possessed man in Gerasene?

Through the Means of Grace, Jesus' victory is offered to everyone. It is very clear in the Order of the Holy Baptism. Three questions are addressed to the parents and sponsors to be answered on behalf of the child: Do you renounce the devil? Do you renounce all his work? Do you renounce all his ways? This is called in Theology “the short exorcism”, where the devil is expelled through the Baptism and Jesus enters the life of the child. The daily renewal of our Baptism happens when we confess our sins to God and receive His forgiveness. It's a daily struggle, but with Jesus we are more than conquerors!

III – Jesus sends us to share the Good News

The Gerasenes didn't want Jesus among them. The healed man wanted to follow Jesus. What was to be done? Jesus wanted to give those people a chance to hear about Him and about God's love. So, He decided not to allow the healed man to go with Him, but he had to stay among his

people to be a missionary among them. Jesus said to him: “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis (in his region) how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed!”

Some Christians think that they are not missionaries, that it is too difficult to give a testimony, that they don't have enough biblical knowledge to share... The man of our story was a newly converted person and Jesus sent him to be a missionary among his family and friends.

When you, parents and godparents, bring your children to the Holy Baptism, you are doing God's mission, you are missionaries. Jesus works on the child, purifying the boy or the girl from the evil spirit, and the Holy Spirit comes to inhabit the new creature of God. When you teach your children at home, when you have daily devotions, when you pray with them, when you bring them to the church, you are doing God's mission. When your children are exposed to God's Word, Jesus can work in their hearts; strengthen their faith and their knowledge.

But we can do more: “Go to your family and tell them...” In the New Testament Time, all the employees and slaves of a house were considered part of the family. - How many people do you have in your farm or at your workplace who are very close to you? Go and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you. The same mercy in Christ is available to all your friends and relatives. Or, if we think about the “extended family” in the African context: What an opportunity all of us have to share the Good News of Jesus with them!

IV – We are in mission

The behavior of the Gerasene was one while he was demon-possessed, and his behavior was totally other after he was healed by Jesus. The evil spirits had made him a violent man, of whom everybody was afraid, and no one was able to bind him. He broke even iron chains which were put

on his arms and feet to subdue him and to hold him quiet. He was living in the cemetery among the tombs, crying out day and night. A terrible image of someone who was controlled by the devil.

Having been healed by Jesus, he was sitting quietly with Jesus and his disciples, dressed and in his right mind. He became a missionary and a servant of the Lord to bring others to the true faith. Instead of the evil spirit in him, he had now the Holy Spirit in him, which enabled him to live a godly life, shining his light to the others and glorifying God.

How is our behavior? Are we led by the Holy Spirit? Or are we still led by evil spirits? A friend of mine told me many years ago that he couldn't pray the Lord's Prayer, because he couldn't link the image of God to the image of a father. His father had been terrible to him, never giving him love. And his father was a pastor... - From this we can see how important is our behavior as a testimony to our family and to others. We are Christians and consequently the Holy Spirit guides our lives. Actions speak louder than words. St. Francis said: Testify with your life. If necessary, use words.

Conclusion: “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” is the Watchword for St. Thomas this year. The members are told to show their faith in deeds and in words to their relatives who are not members of a Christian church. The seed has been sown. We need to wait until it grows, by God's grace. Several events in the church provide the opportunity to invite the family and friends to come to the service. God's Word is powerful and our prayer is that God would reach the stony hearts, transforming them in warm hearts with the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. May God give us all the right opportunity to go and to tell how much the Lord has done for us and how He has had mercy on us. Amen.