

June 20, 2010

Scripture: Luke 8:26-39

Sermon: "In His Right Mind"

We continue our journey with Luke and we come upon a very strange story; strange because it talks about demons and exorcisms; strange because it talks about a man living in a graveyard; strange because it talks about a man who asks Jesus not to torment him. It is a strange story...but here it is, telling us about Jesus' ministry, but here it is, pushing us out of our comfort zones, but here it is, asking us some hard questions.

What struck me as I have lived with this Scripture all week was the community's reaction before and after the healing. Before the healing, the community had tried, really tried to help the man. They tried to assist the man, tried to find ways to lend a hand. They had the guy bound and chained, but he kept breaking the changes. So in the end, the community just accepted the situation. The man is insane; he has demons and he is just not going to fit in with the rest of the community. So He goes to live in the graveyard and they go about their own business. Basically two separate existences.

In my imagination, I see the community telling local visitors, "Oh, that guy, don't worry about him. That's just Bob. He doesn't mean any harm. He just stays in the graveyard, naked, with his demons. We tried to help but it just got too hard. We tried to put him in chains but he kept breaking free. You're better off if you just ignore him like we do. You're better off if you just forget that he's there like we do. You're better off if you just tolerate him like we do.

In the end, the community tolerates this man and his situation. The community manages. The community ignores this man and his situation. Or maybe it is better to say in the end, they found out that it was easier to live with the insanity than to go through the process or effort to find sanity. Or maybe it is better to say that they found out that it was easier to tolerate the situation than to keep trying to change it. Or maybe it is better to say that it was easier to manage the situation than to work towards a solution. Or maybe it is better to say that the community was more comfortable with the situation than taking risks.

Until Jesus comes along...Jesus comes along and things change for the community and they are filled with fear and anger. All of sudden, the situation that was manageable, tolerable, comfortable has changed. It is different. This change forces them to interact with this man. It forces them to actually see him as a child of God. And the community is not sure it likes this new situation at all because now they are not in control, now they are not managing the situation. Now they have to face some realities that may be hard for them to hear or come face to face with their insecurities that they would rather ignore. So what do they do? They send Jesus away. They want to block it all out. They want to forget this transformation ever happened. They want to control, manage, tolerate the situation once more.

How do they do this? They find excuses. "He has put peoples' livelihood in danger. He is losing them money. He has crossed a boundary that separates the haves from the have nots. They come to Jesus and say: "It's time for you to go. We don't want you around here any more. You changed things. You made them different and we are not in control anymore.

But Jesus knows. He knows the real reason they are asking him to get on that boat because They've just discovered that when Jesus comes along, things get uncomfortable; things get a little difficult; things get a little unnerving. He changes the boundaries that we set. He pushes the envelope. Our comfort zones disappear. When Jesus comes along, they community is faced with some hard question such as: "What now? How do we function in this new situation? What is our role in this new situation. And more importantly, when Jesus comes along, people begin to wonder: "What will God ask us to do next in our community? What will God do next in our community?" What will God ask us to do? Frightening questions because when God asks, when God sends, it is not to some tropical location where we can relax on the beach. When God asks, when God sends, we know that the request, that the mission will challenge us, will push us out of our comfort zones. We may even say that the mission or the request may torment us just like the man in the story today.

And we know that when God asks, when God sends, it means that we are not in control. It means that we aren't managing the situation any more. It means change; a very word no one likes.

For the community, it is better to get this man, this Jesus back on the boat and back to the other side rather than to try to discern what God is asking them to do next in their community. It is better to forget the healing ever happened rather than to be changed, than to be transformed, than to be pushed out of their comfort zones. It is better to get Jesus far away from there rather than to embrace that God is calling them, all of them, to something more, be something more, to do something more. It is easier if Jesus just gets back in the boat rather than for the community to realize that things have changed.

Because you see after the healing, after the exorcism, it begins to sink in that things are different now. They just can't ignore this man now. They just can't push him to the margins now like they did before. Before the situation, the community was dealing with, tolerating, managing the insanity, literally and figuratively. They tried chains but they didn't work so the next best thing is ignore and hope that it will go away. He stayed on his side. They stayed on theirs. Everyone is happy. But then Jesus comes along and things change. Things and people are transformed. And the community is not so sure that they like it when Jesus comes along because now they are wondering what will God do next in their community, because now they are wondering what will God ask them to do next in their community?

And in the community's mind, these are questions that are better left unanswered.

But here is the Good News! Jesus says, "Okay, I'll get back on the boat but I'm leaving the man that is healed. Jesus tells the man to go back to the town and to keep sharing how Jesus healed him, keep sharing how Jesus brought him back to life, keep sharing how Jesus put him in his right mind.

Jesus shows the community that they can't go back, that they can't forget, Every time they talk to this man, meet this man on the streets, walk past this man, they will be reminded that the situation has been changed and the Good News just won't go away. It will live with them every day. It will be with them every day. It will be a part of their community every day because this

man, this man that was filled with demons, that was insane, has been restored to his right mind, has been restored to new life, has been restored through the Good News!

This man becomes a very powerful reminder of the realities the community and we as disciples face. Once Jesus comes along, things are transformed and we are forced to ask ourselves: Do we only want to manage? Do we only want to get by? Do we only want to be okay or do we want to truly live? Or do we want to truly be restored? Or do we want to truly experience the peace that comes through God's grace and God's Love?

Do we only want to manage or do we want to live? That is the question that is put before the community in our story and is put before us today. Luke shows a very stark picture of what it is to simply manage for the man and for his community and then Luke shows us what it looks like, what it means to truly live, to be restored, to have the chains broken, to have Jesus come along and be transformed.

And then leaves us with the hard task to discern which one we will choose or are we choosing? Are we simply managing the chaos, simply managing the insanity, simply managing the things that keep us chained or do we have the courage, they want, the strength to be healed, to be made whole, to experience life completely. The choice is ours.

Luke shares a story with his community and with us today that reminds us that when Jesus comes along, things will change and we will be pushed out of comfort zones, that things will no longer be in our control, that things will no longer simply be ignored.

And that's okay because when we open ourselves to Jesus, amazing things happen. We open ourselves to God and God's love. Wonderful ministry opportunities appear and we meet the Lord in a new way. We realize that we are doing so much more than simply managing. We realize that we are living, that we are becoming the people that God created us to be, that we are working to bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth.

And that is the Good News!

And that is the challenge that I bring to you this morning. Midway Christian Church finds itself in a new and different situation. At our congregational meeting, I shared with the congregation that I'm not sure who our next student associate will be or where our next student associate will come from, that all I really know is that things are changing and we can't go on like we've always done.

But there is good news! Just like the community in our Scripture this morning, we can either try to put Jesus back on the boat to send him far away or we can open ourselves to the possibilities, to the opportunities, to the wonderings of what God will do next in our community, of what will God ask us to do next in our community? We just have to ask ourselves as a church, as a community of faith, as part of the Body of Christ here on earth, do we just want to manage or do we want to live? These are only questions that we can answer as we allow ourselves to be pushed out of our comfort zones, as we open ourselves to God and God's calling, as we try to figure out

what it means to be a welcoming congregation here in Midway, here in KY, here in our nation, and here in our world.

Jesus has come along and things are different. They can't and won't go back to the way they used to be. Like the community in our story, we have the hard task of asking ourselves: Do we only want to manage as Midway Christian Church or do we want to live, to become the people that God created us to be, to help bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth?

Do we only want to manage and tolerate the insanity, the chaos, or do we want to find healing, wholeness and new life?

These are frightening questions but questions that we must answer.

How will we respond? What will we say when God asks and when God sends? These are questions that we answer because we know when Jesus comes, we are changed, communities are transformed, and ties that were once broken are healed.

May we have the courage and the strength to embrace our calling as changed, transformed people of God. Amen.