

## **“An Unusual Departure,”**

**Luke 8:26-39, Pentecost 5-C, Proper 7, June 19, 2016**

Departure: Everyone must know what a “departure” is. A departure signifies an “act of leaving.” There is, of course, a physical departure. People, who are catching a flight out of town at the airport, certainly want to know the “Scheduled Time of Departure” beforehand.

But the word “departure” can also signify a deviation from an established norm.

Take for example that man who has never eaten “spicy” foods before in his whole life, but who greatly surprises his wife on their wedding anniversary by driving them to a restaurant featuring only Indian Cuisine; food, endemic to the nation of India. He greatly surprises her when he orders CURRY as a “departure” from his very usual bland diet. There are some “normal” departures, as a matter of routine, but then again there are also some very “unusual” departures that signify a complete break with the routine of one’s past. The Gospel lesson we read is just packed full of some very unusual departures.

### **1. There is first of all the unusual departure of Jesus into Gentile territory.**

That this was an unusual itinerary for Jesus and his disciples becomes clearly evident to us in the use of that word “opposite” in verse 26: *“Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes which is ‘opposite’ Galilee!”* The city of Gerasa was located about 30 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Another city much closer to the sea, only five mile away, was named Gadara. These various names all refer to that same general region, so the story take place very close to the Sea of Galilee.

That this is an area in which many Gentiles are living, becomes abundantly clear to us with the revelation that large herds of pigs were being tended there. Jesus *departs* into what would have no doubt been considered by many of his contemporaries as “pagan” territory, far away from the synagogues of the Jews; far away from the people of Israel and their land. Once again, as he did for the Roman Centurion’s servant (Luke 7:1-10), Jesus brings his power to a Gentile. And it is certainly not insignificant that immediately before this story, on the way there, that Jesus had just silenced a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee, bringing a great spirit of calm to the wind and waves! These ancient peoples believed that demons were the cause of high winds, dark skies and troubled waters!

But now, as part two in this powerful sequence of events, Jesus is going to completely silence the demonic storm in the life of this Gerasene man! Here, Jesus reveals himself to be “An Equal Opportunity God” for any who find themselves stuck in a storm. The man who welcomes Jesus to this foreign territory is in “terrible shape” in every respect of those words! He is unclothed and has been living among the tombs. For all practical purposes, he’s a “dead” man walking around, possessed by demons that drive him into the wilds. He’s a wild thing who breaks physical chains but cannot break the chains in his own life. His demonic problems are “legion” meaning that they are huge!

“Legion” was the designation given to a Roman army of four to six thousand soldiers. Yet, in a moment of lucidity, this demoniac answers the question that the disciples raised for themselves just a short while before this, immediately after had Jesus calmed that horrific storm; a question they could not yet fully answer for themselves: *“Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him” (Luke 9:25b).*

Surprisingly, however, the demoniac gives the right answer—he addresses our Lord as: “Jesus, Son of the Most High God”! This naked, homeless, dead, foreign, outsider sees clearly who Jesus is—unlike Jesus’ own disciples at this point. Yet, this demon-possessed man is still unable to recognize his own sickness. He may have falsely believed that everyone wore chains and shackles as a vogue fashion statement. Ironically, he begs Jesus not to torment him when he is in actuality already being tormented!

When Jesus asks this man his name—the demons that possess him will not allow him to answer the question for himself! They assert their authority over the man once again and say “Legion.”

**2. There is secondly the unusual departure of 4 to 6 thousand demons that have been exorcised from a demon-possessed man.**

In verse 31 we read, *“And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.”* These demons who had been temporarily privileged to depart from hell by Satan to harass this beleaguered man on earth are now about to be cast out of him by the Holy Son of God—but the last place they want to go – is straight to hell! This word “abyss” signifies the depths or pit to which the dead or evil spirits are consigned (Romans 10:7; Revelation 9:1-21).

Since in the mindset of the Jewish people who will be originally reading these words, “pigs” and “swine” were unclean animals—it makes perfect sense to Luke’s reading audience that these demons would request an UNUSUAL DEPARTURE THERE! -- *“They begged our Lord that he might command them to enter into a large herd of pigs. So Jesus gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned” (Vv. 31-33)!*

**3. There is thirdly now a remarkable departure that becomes evident in this man’s whole demeanor.**

What a change there is that has now completely overtaken this man! The healed man put on clothes. He’s in his right mind. This is good news for him. He has now been given by the grace of God a new lease on life! But what was no doubt good news for him becomes bad news for others.

While the man is blessing through Jesus’ healing, there was a great cost for the townspeople associated with this man’s healing. The stock prices for the Hormel Meat Company in Gadara there that day hugely plummeted—on that day when Jesus made “deviled ham.” The owners of the swineherds may well have lost their livelihood. With the plunge of the pigs into the lake, their livelihood went down the drain as well. One storm had stopped but it started another storm in the lives of the swineherd owners! THE HEALING OF ONE MAN CAUSED HURT TO ANOTHER. SO THAT THERE WAS A HIGH COST ASSOCIATED WITH THE HEALING THAT TOOK PLACE THERE THAT DAY—A HIGH COST THAT NO ONE COULD EVER HAVE POSSIBLY PREDICTED.

**BUT ISN’T THE SAME THING TRUE FOR ALL OF US—BUT IN REVERSE? IN THE SENDING OF HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON JESUS CHRIST INTO OUR WORLD—HE HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO BECOME HEALED TOO—TO BECOME NEW PEOPLE—TO BECOME PEOPLE IN OUR RIGHT MINDS, CLOTHED IN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD’S OWN SON? BUT SO THAT WE MIGHT BE HEALED AND MADE NEW, THE HOLY SON TOTALLY PAID THE HIGH COST OF GOD’S REDEMPTION FOR US!** *“And when I think that God his Son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in! That on the cross my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin; then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee, how great thou art! How great thou art! Then sings my soul my Savior God to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art!”*

With our Lord’s casting out of the 4000 to 6000 demons out of this horrendously tormented man, a demon-possessed man was turned into a disciple—and so doesn’t this also signal a high hope for us!?! At first, he begged Jesus not to torment him but then eventually begged Jesus that he might be with him. But Jesus is not satisfied with this man just being in his presence. Jesus calls him to action. This whole person, healed and saved, was given a responsibility to proclaim “how much God had done” for him.

**4. There is fourthly a great many people from the surrounding country of the gerasenes who make the strange request for the unusual departure of Jesus from them.**

There is probably only one other incident in Jesus’ whole ministry as revealed to us in the New Testament Gospels—where a group of people asked Jesus to depart from them. And do you know where and when that was? It was in our Lord’s own hometown of Nazareth, when they had invited him back to become the guest preacher there at the home synagogue one Sabbath Day, at the outset of our Lord’s public ministry!

They liked what he had to say initially, especially when he read from the Prophet Isaiah, *“The Spirit of the Lord of is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor!”*

But when Jesus went on in the true spirit of Isaiah to point out to them that the words they were so easily willing to profess with their lips—were also words that were that were also so blatantly and obviously—at great variance with the lives they were living; well then their response to Jesus did a 180 degree about face!

They turned against Jesus that day the way a circus animal has been known, at times, to turn against its supposed trainer! I read something long ago, I've not forgotten. That there was always a reason that lion-tamers, so to speak, would use a three-legged stool that they would hold up with their left hands in the face of the lions they had hopefully tamed. It was impossible for the lion to focus on each of those three legs at the same time—rendering the beast of the jungle—somewhat less powerful than he otherwise would have been—causing him to become somewhat distracted—and less of a concentrated force against the lion tamer if tempted to turn against him!

Jesus provided a powerful analogy between himself and his relationship to the people in his home congregation—to that of Elijah and Elisha—in the poor relationships they had also experienced with the people of Israel in their day. Jesus said, *“But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land—and Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”* When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him headlong down the cliff—**BUT PASSING THROUGH THEIR MIDST HE WENT AWAY!**

Friends, one day Jesus would die for the sins of the people of Israel and for all of our sins too—but only at God the Father's own appointed hour! No—it was not yet our Lord's time to die, though that time would come!

Most of the time those who came to recognize Jesus for who he really was would never, ever, have ever asked him to depart from him, but many people did then and many people still do so today! You know how John wraps this whole reality when he says in John 3:19-20, *“And this is the judgment. The Light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true, comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God!”*

Shouldn't our response to Jesus and his real presence among us be instead like that of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus that first Easter afternoon? They did not realize for a great part of that very bright and sun-shiny day that the Risen Savior was right there next to. But later that evening they surely would when he would break the bread before their very eyes and share his Holy Supper with them once again!

*“So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent!’”* So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, *“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”*

*And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”* Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:28-35)!

##### **5. Fifthly there is the unusual departure of Jesus when he denies this changed man's request to become a traveling disciple of our lord with Christ.**

Jesus doesn't necessarily mean that for all of us, to genuinely follow him, that we have to sell we have, give our proceeds to the poor, and leaving family and friends behind, follow him to a foreign mission field, though he does ask this at times of some!

Following him in this most unusual way doesn't necessarily imply that we have to manifest our love for Jesus is a physical departure, but sometimes...like the man who drove his wife unexpectedly to that restaurant serving only INDIAN CUISINE where he ate spicy foods in her presence for the first time, we too are called to break with our routine, to deviate from our established norms!

To many of us Jesus also still says today: *"The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, '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)!*

So today being Father's Day I thought I might bring this message to a close by sharing with you one of my favorite Father's Day stories. It's about a young boy whose father taught him how to do something that his grandfather had taught his father—how to whittle things out of balsam wood with a pocket knife.

With enough skill and training the boy one day carved a beautiful little sail boat out of the balsam wood. He made a sail to go atop it and tied a string to the end of the boat. He loved to take it down to the babbling brook not far from their North Carolina home and watch it bobble over the little rapids that the stones in the brook created.

Unfortunately, one day, the boat allowed the little boat to slip away from him. He was heartbroken. He thought that he lost his boat forever. But wouldn't you know it? When the boy was walking downtown in the little N.C. town where he lived, he saw his boat for sale in the front window of a pawn shop. The boy went home and broke his piggy bank and then went back to the store, purchasing that little boat though it took every cent that he had.

On the way home the boy said to the boat: "Now you are twice mine, for first I made you and then I bought you back!"

And isn't this the story of our great God and his love for us. When we had strayed away from him like lost sheep, he sent his only-begotten Son into the world to be our Savior. Jesus bought us back from sin, death and Satan and not with perishable things, as St. Peter reminds us, like silver or gold, but with his holy, precious blood and innocent sufferings and death.

God looks at us today and says: "Now you are twice mine! For first I made you and then I bought you back!"

John says it best: ***"See what love the Father has lavished upon us that we should be called the children of God, for first I made you and then I bought you back!" (1 John 3:1-3) AMEN***