

Sermon for Sunday, March 2, 1975 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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GOD'S LOW BLOW
St. Luke 8:26-39

Text: "The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but he sent him away, saying, 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.'" St. Luke 8:38,39a

For the past several Sundays I have been preaching a series of sermons on the Christian faith. But the other day as I was reading my Bible, I came across a passage of scripture that was really food for thought. That passage of scripture is the one which I read this morning about Legion, the man who was filled with demons. You see, Legion became a Christian - a believer in Jesus. Life had Legion up a tree. As a matter of fact, his situation was so bad that Legion simply could not handle it and he went to pieces emotionally. The Bible tells us that Legion lived in the cemetery, so demented, tore his clothes from his body. When well-meaning friends tried to restrain him, the Bible tells us that in his mad fury he broke the chains and fetters with which he was bound. What a pathetic picture we see of this poor, insane man - living in isolation, unable to cope with life, a raging demoniac.

Yet, the Bible tells us that Jesus healed him. In that sense this story is so very hopeful - no matter what our need, no matter what our problem, Jesus is able to help us handle it and deal constructively with life. If you have some desperate problem in your life this morning; if you have some sin that you cannot control; if there is something in your life that you feel you simply cannot cope with, this story ought to give you hope. You see, no matter how desperate your situation, Jesus can help you handle it. The Bible says that Legion cried with a loud voice - a voice that undoubtedly expressed all of the anguish of his heart - and fell down before Jesus. And Jesus healed him. That's the way with Jesus. He never ignores a cry for help. He never fails to hear a plea for aid. Remember how once a woman with a disease reached out in the crowd to touch him and Jesus was aware of that touch of desperation. Yes, he listens to our needs, he hears our pleas, he responds to our anguished cries. And if you have such needs this morning, all you have to do is cry out to him and fall down before him and he will touch you.

The Bible goes on to tell us that when the people came out to see what was happening, they found the man, seated at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. To my mind, that is one of the most significant statements in the entire Bible. I have a Master's degree in counselling and over the years I have watched professionals in the field of counseling work with people. In all honesty I can say ultimately no one truly got healed apart from a relationship to Jesus. More and more over the years I have become convinced that there can be no real mental health apart from God. Ultimately all of life must find some integrating focus for there to be true mental stability and emotional health. Only at the feet of Jesus can a man truly be in his right mind.

Well, that is what happened to Legion - He cried out to Jesus and Jesus healed him. Whatever emotional anxieties and fears, whatever angers and hates, whatever depressions and paranoia had destroyed him were now under control. Sitting at the feet of Jesus he was finally in his right mind again. Can you imagine how exciting that was to him? He didn't care if he never went home again. After all, it was back there - at home - that life had caved in on him. Now he had found Jesus and in him he found health and healing and wholeness. He wanted to spend the rest of his life in the presence of Jesus. He wanted to go where Jesus went. He wanted to hear him preach and teach, he wanted to be there when he healed - he wanted to tell all the world what Jesus had done for him.

So, when Jesus started to leave, it was only natural that Legion would go with him. And then came the low blow. Jesus said to him, "return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." How would you have felt? In effect Jesus said, "No, you can't go with me. I don't need you or want you. I can handle things. You go on back home." Well, that is a pretty low blow. Just when you have found the most important thing in life, just when you have surrendered yourself to Jesus and committed your life to him, he tells you you can't go with him. No, go back home he says.

And is there any worse place to start a new life, to be a different person? You know, it would be easy to go off to some distant city or some far land and be a Christian, to live your new life, to be a changed person. But it is another thing to go home and be that kind of a person! After all, your wife knows all of your bad habits and is probably quick to point them out. She knows what gets under your skin and how to do it if she is of a mind to. And your kids know you so well. You won't get away with any false piety or fake religiosity for two minutes; they will see right through you. And your friends! Do you think they are going to take you very seriously? They know you too well! Can't you hear them now, "Look at good old Harry. Harry talks to God, boys. Harry's got religion fellows. Come on, Harry, preach us a sermon, Harry."

Yes, go home and show what God has done for you. That really is a low blow, isn't it? For the past several Sundays I've been talking about Zacchaeus and how he got converted. He told Jesus, "Behold, Lord, half of what I've got I give to the poor. And if I've taken anything unjustly from any man, I restore him fourfold." That is really noble, isn't it? But did you ever stop to think how Mrs. Zacchaeus felt about it? No, going home isn't easy. Being a Christian at home is the hardest of all.

Yet, when you stop to think about it, maybe Jesus was right. If you can't be a Christian at home, it won't count much any where else. And what greater impact can a man make with his life than for those who know him best - know him with all of his sins, his faults, his short-comings - to see the dramatic change that Jesus makes in his life? Perhaps, after all, when we go home and declare what God has done for us - go home where people know us the best and who can really see the changes - there - at home - we make the greatest witness of all. And what at first seemed the lowest of blows turns out to be the greatest of blessings - for what greater blessing can a man have than to help his wife, or his children, or his dearest friends, find a close, saving relationship to Jesus? And when I get to heaven, the greatest blessing that I could ever have would be to see my loved ones, my dearest friends, enter into God's presence one by one and to know that I had had a share in their being there.

As usual, the Lord is right. The toughest place to be a Christian is at home - but that's where he tells us to start. If it isn't real there, it isn't going to be very real anywhere else. Because that is true, let me give you some clues to how to do it. Now, the other Sunday we talked about prayer and I defined prayer as having a chat with God. Using the word "Chat" as an anagram, I gave you some elements that I think should be included in prayer. Those elements were: Confession, Hearing, Asking, and Thanking. Did it ever occur to you that those same elements should be a part of our communion, our relationship to people we love? Let's try it and see how it works.

Start with confession. Did you ever stop to think that confessing - or to use another word - honesty - is the basis for a stable relationship? When we lose our temper and shouldn't have - can we say, "Honey, I had no cause to lose my temper.

I confess I was wrong. Please forgive me." Or can we say, "Today I did something foolish. I'm ashamed of it and I need to tell you about it." Most people are afraid of being wrong. They are afraid that others will think them weak if they admit a fault. They are afraid others won't like them if they are not perfect and that they win friendship by never making a mistake. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. If I know you are wrong and you admit you are, it raises you in my esteem and I think more of you for it and like you better. Yes, being honest about ourselves with those closest to us.

And look at the other side if you are not honest. You begin to wear a mask, a facade. You are pretending to be something or someone you know you are not. Your relationship is built on a false premise. And those things you are hiding are pushed down in the unconscious mind. But they are not dead, just temporarily buried. And there, from the depths of the unconscious mind, they will rear their ugly heads to torment you and afflict you. Had you been honest, you would have saved yourself from all of that.

Secondly, just as hearing is important in our prayers as we relate to God, so hearing is important in our relationship to others. How many times have you men gone home to sit and read the paper while your wife is trying to talk to you and finally, in exasperation, she says, "You never listen to me!" Do you listen to your children? I mean really listen - listen to the point that you give them the whole focus of your attention? That's one of the things that has impressed me about Dr. Graham. He may only have a minute to give you, but for those few seconds it is as though you are the only person in the world and you really matter to him, and that he is really listening to you.

And it isn't enough just to hear the words that another says to you. You need to listen with the heart, with the emotions. You need to learn to hear the emotional content of what the other is saying. The intellectual content may be a thin cover for the deep emotional needs being expressed and we need to have ears of the heart - ears that can hear and understand the deep needs that those closest to us may have. You see, when I don't listen to you or pay attention to you, I am really saying, "You are not important. What you say does not concern me." And that is ego destroying to another. I don't have to say something verbally to say it. By my attitude I can reject you quite effectively. But when I give you my attention, when I truly hear you with my heart, then I am building relationships. I am saying, "I care. You are important to me."

Thirdly is asking. If you want something from God, ask him. If you need something from a loved one, why don't we do the same thing? Let me illustrate. Suppose I come home and it has been a hard day. I've been chewed out by the boss, snapped at by a secretary, and a big deal fell through. Emotionally I'm very low and I need some support. But how do I get it? Ah, that's the question! Well, I can come home and be honest about my need and ask my wife, "Honey, I have had a terrible day. Please give me some love and attention." Or, I can play emotional games. I can begin to do things or say things that are trying to get her to give me the attention I need. So, I begin to play emotional games to get what I want. But suppose she doesn't understand my game? Suppose she doesn't read me correctly? And she begins to sense that somehow I am trying to manipulate her - she resents that. Soon we are in conflict and an argument ensues. I end up more damaged than ever and my need hasn't been met. Had I asked for what I needed, all of that could have been avoided. Does your wife - or your husband - play games with you? Or you with him or her? What you both need is an open relationship where you can dare to ask for whatever your real needs are.

Finally, there is thanking. We don't thank God enough. We pray and then things turn out well and we forget to thank God. We do the same thing with each other. Do you want your wife to be a better cook? Start complimenting her and thanking her when she cooks something special - really brag on her. After she gets over the shock, she will knock herself out to get your praise. You see, we enjoy being shocked that way. Most of us chew on the kids when they bring home bad grades, but do we praise them and brag on them and thank them when they do their best - even if it isn't an "A"? You will see them really begin to work to win your praise. Do you wish your husband wasn't such an indifferent dresser? Then praise him and thank him and tell him how handsome he looks the next time he does look nice. If you keep at it you will find him on the list of the ten best dressed men. Yes, praise and thanks can work miracles in human relationships. Try it and see if it won't work for you.

Yes, Jesus tells us to go home and declare how much God has done for us. And we show Jesus in our lives when we live out our Christian faith with those closest to us. After all, should our relationship to God be any different from our relationship to others we love? So, if we believe in having a little chat with God, why not try it with our family and friends? You see, in the process they might discover how much God really has done for us!