

Sermon for Sunday, July 25, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"SOME MEN AT THE MASTER'S FEET"

St. Luke 8:26-36

Text: "...and (they) came to Jesus, and found the man...sitting at the feet
of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." --St. Luke 8:35

One day recently I was reading the Bible when I came to the passage of scripture which is our text for this morning. I was struck by the fact that when the friends of a demented man came for him, they found him sitting at the feet of Jesus and he was in his right mind. In a rather idle way, I began to wonder what kind of people and what sort of circumstances led people to the feet of Jesus and what sort of impact it had on their lives. My curiosity aroused, I began to see a sort of pattern developing and this morning I would like to share with you the significance of being at the feet of Jesus. You see, I discovered that whatever circumstance brought people to Jesus' feet, they came away with a new dimension to their lives.

Notice first that physical healing begins at Jesus' feet. In Matthew 15:30 we are told that great crowds came to him, bringing people with all sorts of diseases and the Bible says, "and they put them at his feet." (See also St. Luke 8:47) One of the things we have rediscovered in our day is the unity of ourselves as human beings. What effects one part of us effects every other part. If we are physically ill, it has an effect on us spiritually and one of the common complaints I hear when visiting in the hospital is, "Andy, I need God's help but I feel cut off from him. I just can't pray." Physical illness has had an impact on people's spiritual health. Or again, every doctor knows that he cannot treat merely the physical symptoms of disease and whether he likes it or not, he is involved in spiritual and mental therapy. Dr. Charles Mayo, one of the founders of the Mayo Clinic, once said, "The mental and spiritual factor in disease varies from 60 to 75 percent." Psychosomatic medicine has become a factor which every medical doctor must take into account.

Now, being a Christian does not insure you against physical disease. Some of the greatest saints I have ever known were people who suffered greatly from some physical disability. Even St. Paul was not exempted and he tells us that he suffered from a thorn in the flesh--a physical disability of some sort. But the point in this: because true health involves the total person, the whole you, it is only at the feet of Jesus that physical ills can ultimately be truly cured. Total health is more than pills and prescriptions. There are times when God does dramatically cure some ill person and there are times, for reasons we do not understand, loved ones perish from some disease. Yet, the fact is, the only place for the physically ill is at the feet of Jesus.

Tied in with this is the second incident in which someone is pictured as being at the Master's feet and it is the man of our scripture for this morning that the Bible calls "Legion". Legion is obviously demented, a man with serious emotional disturbance who today would probably be diagnosed as being schizophrenic. The Bible says he lived in the lonely, desolate tombs and caves along the cliffs that overlooked the grey sea. They had bound him with chains and fetters, but in the wild strength of the mad he could not be held. The Bible says he was a man driven by the devil--a man impelled by inner strivings and tensions that drove him into the wilderness in search of refuge, but for him there was no peace.

Life is sometimes so. All of us, to greater or lesser degrees, are driven by those inner compulsions and needs that we do not understand and frequently cannot control. Forces greater than ourselves seem to possess us and, like Legion, we are often

driven people, tormented by emotions and needs we cannot handle. Yet, the Bible tells us that the man called Legion was found at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. Can we escape the idea that mental health, as well as physical health, is somehow connected to a right relationship to Jesus? Dr. Carl Jung, one of the fathers of modern psychiatry, once wrote, "During the past 30 years, people from all over the civilized countries of the earth have consulted me. Among all my patients over 35 there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life."

This has certainly been true in my own ministry. As a young pastor I earned a master's degree in clinical psychotherapy. I did this because, as an inexperienced, young, green minister, I came face to face with emotional needs in the lives of people that I simply was not equipped to deal with. Yet, I discovered that counselling was not the cure-all that I thought it would be. Over the years I have discovered what Legion discovered that day--true mental health comes at the feet of Jesus. Ultimately a person who enjoys good emotional health is a person who is rightly related to Jesus Christ. As I counsel with people, as we establish a trust relationship, the first thing I want to do is to lead them to Jesus Christ, because without him I know that we will never get to the bottom of that problem; if we do, we can't solve it. We can get marriages stuck back together and limping along, or we can get a person functional in society again, but true health and healing never comes apart from a dynamic relationship to Jesus Christ. Take for instance, alcoholism. We know that an alcoholic is a person with a basic mental problem, for alcoholism is a way of avoiding reality. The cure for alcoholism begins when a person admits his need and seeks help from a power greater than himself. So it is with all of us. As with Legion, mental health for each of us begins at the feet of Jesus, and if you are not at the feet of Jesus in your spiritual life, there is something out of kilter with your emotional life.

I just finished reading John G. Hubbell's book, P.O.W., a history of the American prisoner-of-war experience in Vietnam. The torture our men experienced at the hands of the North Vietnamese is simply incredible. It is hard to believe, as you read that book, that one human being could treat another in that fashion. The author tells us the fact that men could stand repeated torture without losing their sanity was due in case after case to their deep religious beliefs. Col. Robinson Risner, who had served in the Korean war as a pilot and was an "ace" with eight MIGs to his credit, endured incredible punishment as a prisoner. Hubbell writes of Col. Risner, "He did not know how people could long retain their sanity in this situation. So he lost himself in prayer." Once, after enduring intense torture, he tapped out a message from his cell to other prisoners, "...remember that the Vietnamese are God's children, too... Have faith. God loves you. He won't forget you..." Yes, emotional health begins at the feet of Jesus. He won't forget you.

This brings me to a third incident related in the Bible of a man at the Master's feet. In the 17th chapter of St. Luke we are told that Jesus was going to Jerusalem and on the way he passed through Samaria and Galilee. In a village he was met by ten lepers. The Bible says, "(they) stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.'" The Bible goes on to tell us that they were healed. When one of them realized what had happened to him, we are told that he turned back and "fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks." Now, an interesting thing happens. Jesus says to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." The Greek word used here that is translated "well" means "whole" or "entire." So, Jesus says to him, "your faith has made you complete."

Now, the interesting thing about that incident is this: the man was already cured of his physical disability, yet Jesus says that he is well--that he is whole--that he is complete. What did he mean? The other nine lepers who didn't come back were just as cured of leprosy as this man. But Jesus says of him that his faith has made him complete, his act of gratitude has given a new dimension to his life.

The fact is, life without gratitude does not work very well. Do you know what the first question of the Shorter Catechism is? It asks, "What is man's chief end?" and the answer is, "Man's chief end is to glorify God..." Jesus said that the gratitude of the leper who fell at his feet had made him complete. How about your life? Most of us know people who, in spite of everything done for them, seem ungrateful. And doesn't this do something to the wholeness, the integrity, of their personality? I've often wondered about those nine lepers who didn't turn back. Did their healing really make any difference, or did they simply return to their old way of life as it was before they became ill? No, the only one whose total life was transformed was the one who was made whole by the dimension of gratitude.

How grateful are you to God this morning? Life without gratitude lacks something--it is incomplete. And how are you giving expression to your gratitude? What is there about the way you live, the things you do, the ways you act that give expression of your gratitude to God? The leper who was grateful found himself at Jesus' feet.

Now, there are several times the Bible mentions people being at Jesus' feet that I will only mention, for I want to pass on to something else. Twice people are mentioned as being at Jesus' feet for something or someone else. (St. Mark 5:22 and 7:25) So the place for intercession is at Jesus' feet. Another incident describes someone at Jesus' feet listening to him teach. (St. Luke 10:39) So, the place of learning is at the feet of Jesus. On another occasion, people are described as falling at the feet of Jesus after his resurrection. And that means that our own resurrection to eternal life begins at the feet of Jesus. (St. Matthew 28:9) However, the final incident I would like to call to your attention is found in St. Luke 7:37ff. There we read, "And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was sitting at table at the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment." And the Bible tells us that Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

We don't know a great deal about this woman. We know she was a woman of the streets. We know the host for the dinner didn't think much of her. Yet, we do not know what inner compulsions gripped her heart; we do not know what circumstances propelled her down the road to sin that was destroying her life. No, we only know she was a desperate sinner who saw in Jesus the only hope for her life and she fell at his feet and bathed them in her tears. Yes, the only place for penitent sinners who want to change their lives is at the feet of Jesus.

Are you free of sin this morning? Is your life what it ought to be--or even what you want it to be? The Bible says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (I John 1:8) If we sinners want our lives changed, if we want to be forgiven and to have a new beginning, it starts at the feet of Jesus. It is there that forgiveness comes. In his little book entitled, Peace With God, Billy Graham tells this story. "...years ago, in London, there was a large gathering of noted people, and among the invited guests was a famous preacher of

his day, Caesar Milan. A young lady played and sang charmingly and everyone was delighted. Very graciously, tactfully, and yet boldly the preacher went up to her after the music had ceased and said, 'I thought as I listened to you tonight, how tremendously the cause of Christ would be benefited if your talents were dedicated to His cause. You know, young lady, you are as much a sinner in the sight of God as a drunkard in the ditch or a harlot on scarlet street. But I'm glad to tell you that the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, can cleanse from all sin.' The young woman snapped out a rebuke for his presumption, to which he replied, 'Lady, I mean no offense. I pray God's Spirit will convict you.' They all returned to their homes. The young woman retired but could not sleep. The face of the preacher appeared before her and his words rang through her mind. At two o'clock in the morning she sprang from her bed, took a pencil and paper, and with tears dripping from her face, Charlotte Elliott wrote that famous poem:

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!
Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Yes, the feet of Jesus is the place for penitent sinner who wants to be forgiven, who wants to be made whole again. You and I are just as much a sinner as a drunkard in the ditch or a harlot on the street. The only place that the drunkard or the harlot or you or I will find forgiveness is when we weep in sorrow for our sins and fall at the Master's feet.