

Proper 7C, 2010, St. Peter's

Where did you see Jesus this week? Where did you see the Spirit of God evident this week? I am sure we have seen the message of God moving this week, we just need to be able to put on the right pair of lenses to see it happening.

- Maybe last Sunday, we say, we expect to see God moving among those that worship.
- Yet, the Jewish story of Elijah in the wilderness and the story of Jesus healing the Geresene demoniac both are evidence of the movement of the spirit and message of God in places outside of the community of faith . . . in places and people who are not expected to be evidence of God.

In the story of Elijah, we find the great prophet in deep trouble. He is desperately afraid, running into the wilderness, away from the soldiers of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, who are seeking him to kill him.

- He has challenged the authority of the king and queen by killing the prophets of Baal, and the population is not rallying around to support Elijah.
- He is in the desert with no food or water, in utter despair.
- As his strength fails him, God sends messengers in angels to give him water and bread . . . Elijah experiences the grace of God.
- Elijah spends two days gaining his strength as he is ministered to, and he goes off 40 days deeper into the wilderness, coming to Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments.

- He takes shelter in a cave to wait on God. He finds God in *sheer silence*.
- He then hears the voice of God giving him directions as to what is to say to Ahab, Jezebel and the followers of the foreign gods they have introduced into Israel.

Elijah sees God's movement in very **unexpected** places, and in very **surprising** ways, both as the angels care for him and when he hears the voice of God in silence. *Let's go back to our question. Where have we seen the Spirit of God move this week. Have you been served or cared for by anyone? Have you spent any time in prayer and felt the spirit of God touch your soul or your mind?*

Looking at the Gospel story, we see Jesus leading a mission into Gentile territory. This is one of two stories where Jesus confronts those who are non-Jewish.

- One, is the Syro-phonecian woman who Jesus attempts to send away saying you don't feed the children's food to the dogs . . .to which the woman retorts. . . *yet even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that drop from the table*. To which Jesus commends her faith and fulfills her petition.
- This is the other story. The area of the Geresenes on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, is a Gentile area. . . why else would anyone be herding pigs?
- Do you think it is by coincidence that the demons' name is "legion", which not only means "many" but also refers to a body of 6,000 Roman troops.
 1. A demon is an entity that dominates a person, against their will. . . roman legions did something similar as they occupied conquered areas.
 2. *Was Jesus sending a message?*

3. *Not only was he capable of bringing a dominated person to his right mind . . . he defeats the legions that hold Gentiles as well as Jews captive.*

Have we experienced victory over a power that wishes to **dominate our** life this week, powers that *tormented us*? *Have we been empowered by God to turn from a self destructive behavior or a power that is beyond our control for even a day?* If so, we have seen the power of the message of God in Jesus at work.

Power to amend our lives, power to change our world, power to give hope when a person seems beyond help.

A. I want us to notice that Jesus does not allow this Gentile healed demoniac to go with him and his disciples. He sends him back to share how God had saved him, *in the very community that ostracized him, that put him in chains and treated him with such contempt!*

B. Jesus also directs the man to direct his thanks and devotion to God, who healed him, not simply to Jesus.

Whether we recognize it or not, we all have much in common. *There was a saying among the miners of Colorado in the 1859 Gold rush that they all had one thing in common . . . failure.* Whether the eventually struck it rich in the end or not, they had endured failures before they experienced riches. *So it is with us . . . we have all failed. We have all made mistakes, we have all experienced challenges which were beyond our human capacity to conquer.*

- Sometimes our challenges are physical trials, like Elijah.
- Sometimes our challenges are spiritual issues that only prayer, *knowing the presence and deep silence voice of God can meet.*
- Sometimes our struggle is with being ostracized socially as

the demoniac experienced.

- Sometimes we have acted out of control, beside ourselves, in self destructive ways and *needed help from outside of ourselves to regain our sanity.*

Have any of us experienced struggles this week? If so, have we also experienced the power of the message of God?

When you and I admit that we have all failed and fallen short of the glory of God, then we open ourselves up to coming together in a community that celebrates God's saving grace above all else.

As St. Paul puts it “where there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but we are all one in Christ Jesus.” ***We are equals and all connected together by the experience of the merciful and loving message of God that has shown us the way and empowered us to live beyond the challenges we face.***

It is said that matter is never destroyed, it simply goes from one form into another. The same matter that formed the earth at the beginning is reformed to make our bodies and to make the things we build. **You and I are literally made of *star dust*.** We are probably have more in common than we have differences. *Jesus came to reconcile creation, to bring human beings and all of creation into the grace of God.*