

I invite you now, to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 8 verses 26-39. This can be found on page 732 in your pew Bibles. We continue the "Made for Mission" series today. Scripture reveals our message.

Our Fathers Word

They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

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.

The Word of God for the people of God

He never got tired of sharing *his* story. He told it regularly to whoever would listen, and it never got old. The reaction and the look on their faces was always the same, that of horror, as he talked about the voices, and described his ordeal.

The first time he heard them, he was terrified as they whispered into his ear. The voices were so close, so real, that he instinctively turned around to see who was there. He could see nothing. It didn't take long to realize these voices were coming from inside his mind. Never giving him a moments peace, they relentlessly, and cruelly spoke of horrible things, which he was powerless to stop.

Shortly after that, the voices took control of his body, starting with his mouth. Unable to stop them, horrible and disturbing words would overflow from his lips. Then he began to physically harm others. No one understood his problem as he explained the struggle he was experiencing. Eventually all hope was lost when the merciless people from the region, and his very own mother and father bound him in chains in the cemetery, desiring his death. He tried to cry out, "I'm the victim!" But the words wouldn't come out.

Sometime later, after breaking free from the chains, as he walked along the beach alone, he noticed a boat in the distance. The voices were screaming with fear, because Jesus was on that boat. This was not their usual cruel tone. It was unmistakable, they were in terror. He mustered all the strength he had to keep from fleeing into the hillside, standing firmly with both feet in the water. Little did he know that the man on that boat would change his life forever.

Good morning. Welcome to week three of the Made for Mission series. So far, we have learned that God has called all of us on a life of mission with him. We are all called. No matter who we are or what we have done, He has called us to live out a *purpose*, He has planned for our lives. Jesus revealed the urgency of His mission. We must act now, by joyfully embracing it as priority number one in our lives. Following Jesus, following His will, putting Him first.

Today we will discover what that looks like, practically speaking. We first say, “Yes Lord! I will follow!” But **what** do we actually **say** as we witness to others while we live on mission? “**What’s my message?**” If you have been a Christian for some time then you understand that *this* is at the *very heart of following* Jesus. Sharing the Gospel. If on the other hand this is all new to you, just understand that *this* is *crucial* to being a *follower* of Jesus. *This part* of your mission must be approached intentionally with resolve, or opportunities God is using you for will pass right by.

While sharing the good news of Jesus, (while sharing *your* story) have you ever felt like you were speaking a foreign language? As you struggle to say precisely the right thing, it comes out all garbled, and you feel as though you are confusing them more than helping? While having a casual conversation you speak with ease, and the moment you mention God, you get all choked up, and fumble for words. I don’t know about you, but I’ve been there. So, if you can relate to this, then get ready for some encouragement from today’s scripture passage.

(Mark 5:1-2) They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him.

Where they went, across the Sea of Galilee to this region of Gerasenes is significant. They were now in a land of non-Jewish descent. The descendants here were from people allowed to remain after the Israelites failed to clear out the promised land as God had commanded.

Upon their arrival, as this man with an impure spirit approaches, the disciples must have felt they were in a much worse area than they originally believed it to be. Ready to jump back into the boat and depart, the disciple's reaction to this man, unlike Jesus', must have been fearful. Jesus however, is on a mission to make disciples that will share their story for the sake of others salvation. But how can Jesus possibly use a demon possessed man? Someone with an impure spirit. Let's find out.

(Mark 5:3-5) This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

We never know when someone will accept Jesus Christ into their lives. Their current disposition, their life without Jesus, their future destined for hell, can be resolved. It takes you. It takes living on mission with Jesus to make that difference. It takes your witness, sharing your story, to bring them closer to a relationship with God. To bring them from where they are, to the love of Jesus. Just because they have rejected God in the past, doesn't mean the same result will occur with you.

The exact number of unique spiritual encounters it will take for an individual to come to Christ varies person to person. For some only one, others it may take seven, and yet, others could require many, many more.

The impact our loving words will make is impossible for us to know, but we must be persistent if we take our mission to heart. To make a difference in their situation takes us sharing our situation, sharing our story. Here, God's concern is our obedience, not our impact. God only demands our obedience, not a 10/10 record of leading others to Him. We have to be ready at all times to share our story, because we never know when the opportunity will be present, and could pass us right-on-by.

This demon possessed man, based upon his current condition, apparently had a terrible background. *Who* would want *him* on their team? Jesus did. Yes, he was unloved, isolated, chained up, abandoned, and left for dead, but he was not unwanted. His *condition* had no bearing on Jesus' mission, even as the scene gets pretty intense.

(Luke 8: 28-29) *When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man.*

Notice the man's question, "What do *you* want with *me*?" Look at this from his perspective. He has been left all alone feeling unloved, disgusted, rejected, afraid, and abandoned, not to mention with demons possessing him. He has no one to care for him, no one to love him. All his hopeless existence has known for some time now is pain, torture, and generally bad or even horrible treatment from

everyone. The villagers, his mother and father, everyone he knew simply wanted him to die. He fully expects the same from Jesus. “What do *you* want with *me*?” He is prepared for the worst. Look how Jesus responds.

(Luke 8:30) Jesus asked him, “**What is your name?**” “**Legion,**” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. Jesus responds with *mercy*, with *love*.

What is your name? Jesus wanted to know his name. Notice the man is so overpowered by his impure spirit, the demons in his life, that he’s unable to speak his name. He refers to himself as, “Legion.” How can someone’s life become so meaningless, so hopeless that they lose their identity in God, and call themselves—worthless, ugly, alone, stupid, evil, useless? Where do you find your identity? In your failures and weaknesses, or in your victories and strengths. In your state of mind and body? Or do you find *your* identity in *God*?

I still get a laugh from a comment made years ago by one of my mentors, about *my* identity. Everyone who knew me knew I was pest control Ray. Equally so, everyone who knew me also knew I was all about sharing God everywhere I went. So, I was introduced one day, “This is Ray, he share’s Jesus with everyone he meet’s, and if a bug dies in the process, it’s a great day.”

(Luke 8:32-33) **A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.**

Anything other than Jesus ultimately leads to death. This man gets to see firsthand; where living apart from Jesus leads, and what the final destination will be if the demons in our life possesses or controls us, death.

We need to face the reality; that when we love God, and serve with Jesus on a life of mission, we are hated, and attacked by the Devil even more. Satan, has a horrible plan for us through the hatred he has for us. A plan to steal us from Jesus, but Jesus has the victory. Revealed to us the Gospel of John 10:10, where Jesus says “The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but I have come to give you life and life to the full.”

What does Jesus want with him? In his desire to have a one-on-one relationship with everyone, Jesus asks for his name responding with mercy and love because he cares and wants to help. Unlike anyone else, he offered help. Where everyone would bind him and keep him away, Jesus offered freedom. Where everyone wanted his death, Jesus offered him life, life to the full!

Jesus cared less about the mess this was making, and infinitely more about this mans life. This wasn't just a small mess either, a few pigs drowning. It was someone's livelihood now at the bottom of a sea. In Jesus' example, lives are the most important matter, even if gets a little messy every now and then. Even when helping is not the popular opinion.

I remember a good friend of mine Ned, who is now gone to be with our Lord. Now *he* knew how to make a mess. He was a friend that following Jesus on a life of mission led me to. Someone who was lost, isolated, bound in a sense, rejected by family, and had very few people that cared for him. He was a local resident here in the area who was somewhat despised.

In his younger days when he was out there making such a great impression on people with his careless behavior, tragedy came his way. In a senseless accident, involving the roof of a garage, and a shallow pool, he was left paralyzed from the

neck down. After that, he was almost like the man with the impure spirit, with everyone just wishing he would die.

He remained in his bed paralyzed for the rest of his life with only one person caring for him. Leaving his bed only with ambulance assistance going to the doctor or hospital. With all his damaged relationships being left unresolved. Hated by many and loved by few, Ned was the mission Jesus came for.

Through frequent visits, reading the bible with him, praying with him, getting him connected with a great bible study program on t.v., he slowly started to come to Jesus. It wasn't too long after that, Ned found the strength to get out of the bed he had been in for decades, to come to church to be baptized and take communion.

If we don't follow Jesus, on a life on mission with Him, opportunities like Ned will pass by. Even when it's not the popular opinion to love, you can be used by God to love. To lead them from where they are, into a loving relationship with God. Then let Jesus do the rest.

(Luke 8: 34-35) When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

We should be inspired by this to be as committed as Jesus is when it comes to making disciples. He traveled across a sea, faced raging storms, to help a naked crazy man with an impure spirit. Most of us would jump back into the boat or run for help rather than reaching out with mercy and love to someone hated by so many. Jesus saw him differently. What did Jesus want with him? The same thing he wants with us. A relationship. This mission group cared so much about this mans identity and dignity, they even provide him with fresh clothes.

I can only wonder what the conversation was as this man sat at Jesus' feet. Now fully restored to health experiencing the love of Jesus. I'm sure at one point this man asked, "how can I be saved?"

(Luke 8:36-37) Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. 37 Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

Here is a whole crowd of people not ready to accept Jesus and he knew it. Without trying to reason or argue with them, without dispute or conflict Jesus simply leaves peacefully. This miraculous healing alone should have been enough to save them all. After all, they knew the man Jesus helped, all too well. Knowing this crowd is not ready to turn from their lives of sin to follow him, Jesus focuses on the man this mission was about. All of this chaos, for one single person.

Jesus travelled *across the sea* for this *one* man. In the scripture passage just prior to this encounter, while on-route they were all nearly drowned in a raging storm, for this *one* man. Jesus knew this demon possessed man was worth the danger they were in. Just as he knows *you* are all worth it. Just as he knows *the person* he has planned for *you* to share *your story* with, is worth it.

Luke 8:38-39 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.

A man begs at the foot of Jesus to follow, and then he is sent away. Taken in the wrong perspective this seems a bit harsh. After a life of being rejected, now finally healed, he finds peace and love in this new relationship, and he is sent away.

Not only that, but he is sent back to his home town, who knows this man and what he is capable of. Was he being rejected again? Was Jesus refusing him to join his mission? Far from it. Jesus is revealing to us, this man is ready *now*. He *now* has everything required to be an effective witness. To us this may seem a bit sudden. Jesus is sending a man away on a life of mission, who has a relationship with God, and a personal salvation story.

He is ready, willing, and following Jesus. Only moments after being healed from an impure spirit. Only moments after becoming a disciple, and Jesus is already sending *him* on a mission. No additional training required, no special equipment, just return home, and share *your* story about how much God has done for you.

As this now *fully prepared* man follows Jesus on a life of mission, he is first sent back to his home. Sharing *his story* about a *relationship* with Jesus. Sharing about the love and salvation found in Jesus. The Gospel of Mark tells us that this man not only returned home, but he went throughout Decapolis to evangelize. The good-news of Jesus Christ was preached in this ten-city region through the sharing of a life story of a once horrible man. He had a lot to tell about his story. God has a purpose for him. Just as God has a purpose for you. You have a lot to tell about your story.

Some very encouraging scripture about our life on mission with Jesus. Our goal here today, the answer to our question, “What’s *my* message?” has just been given to us by Jesus. It couldn’t be simpler. Share your own personal story, how God’s grace touched your life. How has God’s love changed you? How has God’s goodness intersected with your life and touched your soul? How has God’s gift of Jesus moved your heart. Share where you have met Jesus in your struggles.

Share how has he healed and restored you. How much joy and peace do you now have in your life since you have decided to follow Jesus? Share that!

Your story, about your relationship with God, you should never get tired of sharing it. Can you do *that*? Tell *your* story. If so then you are prepared for your mission. Back when you first came to Christ you may have been on fire, telling as many people as you could. That fire may be cooling down, or it may have even burned out. You may have lost focus of your mission, or your passion to follow isn't what it used to be. I get it, it happens, we can all go through this from time to time. But you can rekindle the fire. You can get your passion back. If you follow Jesus.

Let me share with you what I do to keep my zeal to serve, and my passion to follow Jesus. Prayer and never forgetting my past. Who I was, where I was, before I came to Christ.

Daily, moment by moment, prayer connects me with God's will for my life. Prayer is my lifeline to God. Prayer puts the zeal in my step. Prayer reminds me of my identity in God, and prayer reminds me of my decision to follow Jesus. I'm going to share a prayer with you that I have been praying for years that accomplishes this for me each and every time I pray it. I close my prayer time with it to remind myself that I'm made for mission and have a very important message to share. A message of salvation. We will pray that together in a moment for our closing prayer.

For me, remembering my past, my former self and life prior to accepting Jesus as my Lord and Savior is significant in how sharing my story impacts others' faith. Remembering where I came from, the darkness I was in, the demons in my life that controlled me, and the victory over everything that came with my relationship with Jesus. Remembering that, helps my story to have impact.

Then I just share, and share a lot. Don't forget, God's concern is our obedience, not our impact. The Holy Spirit will be there with you making all the impact needed, and the timing is all God's. So don't be distressed when it seems like you are not making a difference. You are making all the difference, and *that* can change *everything*.

The formerly-possessed man begged to follow Jesus. He didn't say, "I can't do this! I'm not the person for this mission! I'm not good at talking about God with others! No one will listen!" Based upon scriptures depiction of this man, I think its safe to say, we are all better off on our worst days than he was on his best days, before Jesus changed his life. Jesus had a purpose, even for this mans life.

Jesus used an exiled, rejected, naked crazy man with an impure spirit running around in caves to share the Gospel. If he can use him as bad as he was, he can use anyone he chooses. He chose *you* to follow. Can he use *you*? You have no idea the impact God will make through *you*. The very revival our church is hoping for could begin through the next person God leads you to. So now, your mission, and your message is clear. Will you share your story?

Let us Pray

Heavenly Father,

May we glorify you in all we do.

Blessed are you forever and ever. The creation is filled with your glory.

Help us to never forget that you, the one true God, sent Jesus to be our savior.

Let us trust the power of eternal life your Son,

our Lord Jesus Christ offered to this world and to us.

In the light of your perfection, we see our own failings.

We confess that we have been preoccupied by our own needs.

Forgive us for the times when we have neglected others,

and have lacked generosity. By your power restore us to faithfulness.

Each day help us complete the tasks you have for us to do, as we fulfill them,

let your glory shine through all we do, so others will see your nature through us.

Remind us daily of the truth of your goodness and redeeming love of Jesus our lord.

May we always live through your power and peace

and in unity with all others who are faithful to you.

Keep us committed to our responsibility for this world,

even when our commitment may not be popular.

We pray Father, that you will keep us from the power of evil.

Now bless us with your truth and keep us faithful to it.

Let us live, that others will come to believe in you because of our example.

May the whole world experience your love through us and through others faithful to you.

Direct our thoughts, speech, and steps to the end that we may walk in your way today and always.

In the name of our risen king Jesus we pray. Amen.