

**Engage Bible Study: Luke 8:26-9:17- Healing, Sending & Feeding
November 28-30, 2011**

“Who is this that commands even the wind and the waves and they obey him” is the question we were left with last week as Luke continues to reveal to us Jesus as the Messiah. Remember that from the very start of his gospel Luke has told us that his purpose in writing is so that “you may know the truth” concerning Jesus and what God is up to through him. The section we’ll look at today continues that same theme of revealing the true identity of Jesus as the Messiah.

Healing the Gerasene Demoniac (8:27-39)

You may recall that in the last story we read Jesus calmed the storm by rebuking the wind and the waves, as if exorcising them. When Jesus and the disciples arrived on the other side of the Sea of Galilee they experience yet another need for exorcism. Let’s read 8:27-39 [READ]. Luke has already recorded stories of Jesus exorcising demons, so why does he do so again? Because this story has some unique characteristics, beginning with its location. Various ancient copies of the gospels locate this exorcism in different places, so no one is certain where it happened but each of the possibilities has one thing in common: they are Gentile territory.

The description of the possessed man points to the severity of the possession. He is wild, naked, and uncontrollable and lives not within society but outside of it among the tombs. This description points to the destructive power of evil in the world and points to a man in desperate need of restoration. We’re told that the demon’s name is Legion. In the Roman world a legion referred to a company of thousands of soldiers. In other words Jesus is engaging in a major battle here in enemy territory. He is outnumbered, but not outmatched!

As has happened before the demons recognize who Jesus is and beg him not to torment them. And then they make two specific requests. First, they ask not to be thrown back into the abyss. What is this abyss? In the ancient world the abyss was thought to be the abode of spiritual powers, the dead, imprisoned spirits and the place of Satan’s imprisonment. Perhaps the demons don’t wish to return there because for them it represents imprisonment. Second, the demons ask to inhabit a herd of pigs, though we have no idea why. What we do know is that the pigs panic and cast themselves into the sea and drown, once again showing the destructive power of evil.

One of the more remarkable aspects of this story is the response of the townspeople. They hear what Jesus has done, come out to see him and ask him to leave the area for two reasons. First, they’re afraid. The possessed man frightened them; enough they tried to chain him. Jesus has even greater power and the people cannot contain him. Second, they want Jesus to leave because of his economic impact. A whole herd of pigs was of great value but now they are lost. Luke records a similar experience in Acts in which Paul exorcises a slave girl who made money for her master by fortune-telling.

Paul, too, was forced to leave the area because the exorcism had economic impact. Sometimes the gospel impacts the economic realities of our lives and communities and in those moments we need to decide which we'll worship: money or the Lord.

The man from whom the demons were cast is now restored, clothed and in his right mind. He asks to travel with Jesus and the other disciples but Jesus sends him on a different mission, to go to his hometown and bear witness to what God has done for him. Once again, those whose lives are most radically transformed by Jesus tend to be the strongest witnesses for Jesus.

Two Lives Restored (8:40-56)

Let's move on to the next story, 8:40-56 **[READ]**. Jesus and the disciples have moved to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and in so doing have moved back into Jewish territory. Just as location – in Gentile territory – was significant in the story of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, the location of these two miracles, back in Jewish territory, also becomes important. What primarily draws these two stories together is the fact that, while both of those who were restored were likely Jews, because of their condition they were outsiders. According to the Jewish law a woman with a hemorrhage was ceremonially unclean, as was everything and everyone she touched. And because Jarius' daughter had died she and everyone who touched her corpse, was considered unclean. But Jesus embraces and restores both. By recording these events Luke is driving home the point that there are no barriers to Jesus' power and healing.

While Mark is fond of framing one story within another, this is the only time that Luke does so. The story of Jarius and his daughter provides the frame for the story of woman healed of chronic bleeding. Did you notice that in this section a certain number shows up twice? What number is that? Yep, it's twelve. Jarius' daughter is about twelve years old, and the woman has suffered with the hemorrhage for twelve years. It's possible that Luke uses this number symbolically to refer to Israel. If so, his point is this: within Israel these two women are outsiders, but they are not outsiders to Jesus.

Now let's look more deeply into both stories. As Jesus and the disciples come ashore a crowd awaits them, including a synagogue leader named Jarius. Just as the demoniac did, Jarius falls to his knees at Jesus' feet and begs Jesus to come to his home to heal his dying daughter. His plea is urgent and time is of the essence, so Jesus leaves with him immediately and the crowd follows along.

Among that crowd is the woman with a hemorrhage. Technically she should not have been in the crowd, and she was certainly breaking the law by touching Jesus, which explains why she seeks to touch Jesus and be healed without anyone noticing. But Jesus does notice. He asks the crowd "Who touched me?" The disciples are floored by Jesus' question because he's in the midst of a crowd. All sorts of people are jostling him. The point here is that this woman touches Jesus with both intention and with faith. We might ask how it's possible that the One who casts out demons and raises people from

the dead doesn't know who touched him. But the point here is not what Jesus knows. The point is that Jesus calls this woman out. Her faith may be personal but Jesus will not allow it to be private. Jesus not only heals her and publicly affirms her faith, thereby reconnecting her with the community from which she has been ostracized; he also makes her a witness.

Meanwhile imagine the frustration in Jarius. Every moment spent with this woman brings his daughter closer to death. And in fact we learn that his worst fears have been realized. A messenger comes to announce that Jarius' daughter is dead. The teacher is no longer needed. But Jesus tells them not to fear. They only need to believe and the girl will be saved. Catch the nuance here. Jesus had just publicly affirmed an unclean woman for her faith. She now becomes a model for Jarius, as Jesus calls him to have faith.

In the ancient world those with resources would hire professional mourners. A lack of weeping and wailing was a mark of disgrace and disrespect and so people literally hired mourners to honor the dead. These are the ones who laugh when Jesus says, "She is not dead, but sleeping." These mourners had been around death more than most. They knew its finality. But they didn't know who it was that was speaking to them. Notice that Jesus takes the dead girl by the hand, again breaking the ceremonial law. Once again, with the power and authority of his word, Jesus calls the girl back to life. And she doesn't come back to life sick but whole and well, well enough to stand and eat.

Finally, it's interesting to note that while Jesus told the exorcised demoniac to go home and be a witness, here Jesus tells the parents to tell no one about raising the girl to life. Why Jesus does this is unclear. Perhaps Jesus didn't want to confuse this miracle with the resurrection. This little girl would one day die again. When Jesus is raised from the dead death will have lost its power.

The Mission of the Twelve (9:1-6)

We come now to a turning point in the gospel. For some time the disciples have watched Jesus do ministry. Now it's their turn. Let's read 9:1-6 [READ]. Jesus intends that the good news of God's Kingdom and the accompanying acts of power might be spread throughout the nation of Israel. From the time he chose the twelve he called them "apostles" and if you remember that title literally means "one who is sent." And so Jesus equips them and sends them to do what he has been doing. Notice that their mission is three-fold: exorcise demons, heal and preach the reign of God, and to do that Jesus equips the disciples with power and authority. Remember those two words? Back in Luke 4 we were told that Jesus' words had power and authority...dynamis and exoosia. Now the twelve disciples are equipped with the same resources. They do not serve on their own authority but on God's authority, and they have power to back up with words.

And Jesus gives the disciples some specific instructions. The first set of instructions concern what they are to carry with them...not much! They are to go with the bare minimum. Essentially Jesus is telling them that they must trust God to provide for them as they travel. That way their words and their lives will align. The second set of instructions concerns hospitality. It was the expectation in the ancient world that strangers would be offered a roof over their head and food. Rather than moving from house to house, shopping for the best option, the disciples were to go to the first option offered and stay there so as not to insult their host. And if the disciples are refused hospitality they are not to retaliate but to perform a simple act of judgment – they are to shake the dust off their feet. Shaking the dust of unaccepting towns from their feet showed extreme contempt for an area and its people, as well as the determination not to have any further involvement with them. Pious Jews would do this after passing through Gentile cities to show their separation from Gentile practices. If the disciples shook the dust of a *Jewish* town from their feet, it would show their separation from Jews who rejected their Messiah. This action also showed that the disciples were not responsible for how the people responded to their message.

My wife, Nancy, and our son, Jacob, traveled to Haiti a few years ago to serve at a school connected to our church in Ohio. At one point in their trip they traveled across the border into the Dominican Republic. They discovered that every vehicle that passed from Haiti into the DR was literally hosed down at the border. When Nancy asked why she was told that the Dominicans did not want the mud of Haiti brought into their country. It was a sign of their contempt for their Haitian neighbors. Not unlike what Jesus told the disciples to do in a town that would not accept them.

And so, equipped and empowered, the twelve disciples went into the surrounding villages, proclaiming the good news and curing diseases.

Herod's Perplexity (9:7-9)

Jesus and the disciples' ministry in the Galilee was remarkably successful, so much so that news of it reached Herod. Let's read about it in 9:7-9 [READ]. Though this passage is very brief it marks one of the most significant transitions in Luke's gospel. Jesus is at the height of his popularity but by the end of this chapter Jesus will make the turn toward Jerusalem and his death.

Because Jesus' ministry attracted great crowds it also attracted the attention of the political authorities. Herod has heard three different opinions regarding Jesus that represent the rumor mill in the Galilee. Some say that Jesus is John the Baptist come back to life. Herod had beheaded John earlier, so the idea that John had come back to life would have been deeply disturbing to Herod. Others were saying that Jesus is Elijah come again, and still others that Jesus is one of the ancient prophets arisen. These rumors would have also troubled Herod. The peace between Rome and Israel was tentative in the best of times. There was almost always a smoldering hatred just below the surface, and with some regularity some zealot would come along and rile up the

Jews which led to conflict and bloodshed. Caesar wanted peace, and if those in charge could not keep the peace they could be replaced...and Herod had no intention of being replaced. Later in the Gospel we'll learn that Herod has wanted to see Jesus for some time because he wants to witness a miracle.

There are two very important things that Luke wants to communicate through these verses. **First**, this is a clear foreshadowing of Jesus' death. This is not the vague anger of religious leaders who "wonder what to do" about this Jesus. Jesus' ministry has now reached the center of political power and disturbed a man who has already murdered one prophet: John the Baptist. Second, Herod asks the questions that not only connects this section with the last but also forms the heart of what is to come, "Who is this about whom I hear such things." The disciples asked this question after Jesus calmed the storm. Now the question rests on the lips of one who wants to know for very different reasons. Before long Jesus himself will turn that question onto the disciples.

Feeding the Five Thousand (9:10-17)

Let's close today's study with a familiar story, 9:10-17 **[READ]**. If you want to know how important this story was the early Church you only need to consider that it is the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospels.

The disciples have returned from their mission and they tell Jesus all about it. Jesus takes the disciples to the city of Bethsaida for a little retreat, just as he himself often retreated after a busy season. Bethsaida was a town on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee. In addition John's gospel tells us that it was the home town of Peter, Andrew and Philip. As was so often the case a large crowd follows Jesus, and despite the fact that Jesus and the disciples intended to get some rest the needs of the people always takes precedence, and so Jesus spends the day teaching, preaching and healing.

But the sun begins to set and they're in a rather remote location. The disciples urge Jesus to send the crowds home so that they can find something to eat, but that would require Jesus to stop teaching, preaching and healing. And so Jesus tells the disciples to feed the crowd. There are two problems with that. First, there are over 5,000 to be fed. Second, all the disciples have are a few loaves and fish. But you know how the rest of the story goes!

There are few important things to note about this story. First, notice the location. They are in a lonely place, a wilderness, which connects this story to the God feeding the Israelites with manna and quail in the wilderness. Like God the Father, Jesus is able to supply the basic needs of his people. Second, notice that the disciples are the agents of this feeding. Luke puts this story immediately after their first missionary journey to continue the theme that it will be the disciples –you and me – who will do Jesus' work of teaching, preaching, healing and feeding after Jesus' resurrection. Third, this story continues to emphasize Jesus' compassion, especially for the poor and needy. Fourth,

this story foreshadows the Lord's Supper. Notice the language in verse 16 – he took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to the disciples. That is a clear foreshadowing of the common meal that disciples would share. And finally, there is a subtle message in this story that disciples are called to allow the needs to others to interrupt their plans. In fact, that is not an interruption; it's ministry.

So, what do we learn from today's section? Here are a few thoughts:

- The ministry of Jesus Christ has been given to all disciples. We have all been called, equipped and empowered to be about Jesus' work. We all have a calling, a vocation, in which God works through us to further the work of the Kingdom. One of the worst things that's ever happened to the Church, I believe, is that Christians have come to see themselves as belonging to a church rather than being the Church. We see ourselves as recipients of what the church offers, not as those who are privileged to serve. So, how are you being a disciple in daily life?
- How are you exhibiting your trust in God? Is your trust in the Lord, or is it in something or someone else? In what does your security lie?
- How do you handle the "interruptions" of daily life? Are they a nuisance or are they opportunities for greater ministry?