

**Sermon for June 20<sup>th</sup> 2010 Luke 8**

**When Jesus and his disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasenes they were stepping off the boat into a Gentile land – a place that the Jewish disciples would have considered “unclean”. A territory they would normally have avoided completely. And the first person to greet Jesus as he entered this unclean territory was a man driven by a legion of demonic forces. A complete outcast who was forced to live in the tombs among the dead. He was considered unclean to the Jews and he was homeless in his own community.**

**This Gerasene man was viewed not unlike homeless people are viewed in our own society today. Unclean, outcast, considered possessed by mental illness, ignored and invisible.**

**I’ve worked in homeless shelters, have handed out food and money to people on the streets of Chicago, but after reflecting on the man who lived among the tombs in today’s Gospel lesson I realized that I don’t have any true idea about what it means to live without a roof over my head.**

**The Bishop of Rhode Island, Geralyn Wolf, spent a month of her life in 2003 disguised as "Aly," a homeless woman, in shelters and soup kitchens across the northeast United States. She must have realized the only way to come as close to knowing how the homeless really live was to live among them as one of them. She grew out her hair, used her nick name on her fake ID, and set out to the streets.**

**In an interview with Episcopal News Service after the experience she was asked to describe what it was like to see all of the suffering up front. Her response was this:**

**“It's not like it was unexpected. I think my deep sadness came when I realized how fine many of these people were, that you see people who really do have dreams and hopes, values, who are trying to make it, who have been put down many times, whose formal education maybe is limited.**

**In the US we like to think that you can always pull yourself up by your bootstraps. But not everybody gets those bootstraps. Some don't even have the boots.”**

**It was the person without boots who Jesus stepped off that boat to see that day. And he healed that man of his demons. Luke has given a vivid demonstration that Jesus brings good news to the poor. Over and over in the Gospel lessons we hear about Jesus stepping out to meet those who are suffering, those on the margins, demonstrating that no one is beyond the reach of Christ's redeeming healing love.**

**Just as Jesus went to the demon possessed man in a Gentile land, we are called to step out of the boat on the opposite side. The mission of Jesus' followers is to take the healing and liberating love of God to broken and desolate regions, to those whose lives are bound by demonic forces they can not control.**

**We find it in our baptismal covenant and in our Eucharistic liturgy – this call to go to the other side with the good news of salvation.**

**The book titled “Same Kind of Different as Me” is a true story coauthored by a black man named Denver Moore who lives on the streets of Fort Worth and a white wealthy man named Ron Hall who meets Denver at a soup kitchen. In it Denver describes why the people in the shelter trusted Ron’s wife, Debbie. He says in the book “it was the way she treated the homeless that made them accept her as their friend. She never asked them any questions, like how come you are here? Where you been? How many times you been in jail? How come you did all those bad things in your life? She just loved them – no strings attached.”**

**He went on to say: “That’s the way she loved me to. The Word says God doesn’t give us credit for loving the folks we want to love anyway. No, he gives us credit for loving the unlovable. The perfect love of God doesn’t come with conditions, and that’s the kind of love Miss Debbie showed the folks at the mission.”**

**After the people staying at the mission found out that Debbie had been diagnosed with cancer, Denver wrote the following:**

**You know, if you aint poor you might think it's the folks in them big ole fine brick churches doin all the givin and the carin and the prayin. I wish you could seen all them little circles a homeless folks with their heads bowed and their eyes closed whisperin what was on their hearts. Seemed like they didn't have anything to give but they was givin what they had, taken time to knock on God's front door and ask him to heal this woman who had loved them.”**

**I mentioned earlier that I don't know what it is like to live without shelter and that is true – but I do believe that everyone one of us on some level at some point in time in our lives knows what is like to be the outcast person – or to be homeless – no not homeless in the sense of the word that we don't have shelter over our heads, but homeless in a much deeper sense – where we do not feel at home in our souls. Where we have strayed from our Godly home, where we are without peace.**

**This “homeless” man named Denver brought home to many, including the coauthor of the book, what it meant to be at home with God. It is not fair to categorize the people living in streets or in shelters or anyone else for that matter as “other” for it is clear that many times they are more at home with God than many people who live in houses like our own – with what we consider the comforts of life. After all aren't we all outcasts? No, better yet, aren't we all inherent children of God seeking to find a home in the heart of Christ?**

**For whom is God calling you to step off the boat? It might be the homeless, but it also might be a family member with whom you need to be reconciled, or a person at work who is constantly on your back, or an elderly person who has a hard time hearing or speaking, or a person in a third world country who you don't even know.**

**Or perhaps this is a time in your life wherein rather than being the one who steps off the boat into an unknown territory you are the one to fall before Jesus and shout for help at the top of your lungs. Only when the man fell before Jesus did he find any kind of hope. We find peace and transformation at the feet of our Savior.**

**And after all it is Christ who is always there stepping off the boat into the land of us misfits – to cast out our own demons – with his healing presence. Jesus came into this world in order to save each of us from our own homelessness and he calls us to tell our stories of his saving grace to those we know – in our own hometowns and those we don't know in other parts of the world.**

**At the end of this Gospel lesson the healed man wants to go with Jesus and asks him if he can. First of all – it seems clear that this man is asking Jesus this question because it would be easier for him to follow Jesus than to stay in his own home town. But Jesus knows that in order for the word of Christ's love to spread in that region – as difficult as it would be for the healed man – he needed to stay there and tell his story.**

**Tell your story of God's healing presence in your own life. Sometimes it will be more difficult to share that story with those who know you well, sometimes it will be more difficult to share it with people who appear to be different than you – people you don't know. Regardless, it is clear that we are called to tell our stories over and over again of God's redeeming love that he made known to us through his only Son, Jesus Christ and of God's amazing grace that sweet sweet sound that brings our lost souls home.**