

Sermon for Sunday, June 23, 2019

“Telling New Stories About Our Lives”

Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 23, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

When Jesus heals a man possessed by demons, you'd think his community would rejoice! He's healed! He's free! He can come home! No more chains, no more scary guy crashing around out there in the wild. Hallelujah!

But it doesn't quite play out like that. When the people find him clothed and in his right mind, we're told first that they are afraid and then that they are “seized with a great fear.”

It could be they're just freaked out that Jesus could do such a thing; and they're probably worried about the safety of their pigs when Jesus is around. But it also seems like they're still really afraid of this man, even after he's been healed. Maybe they're worried that this guy that they've kept chained and shackled will take revenge on them now that he is more in command of himself. Maybe they just can't bring themselves to trust that he's safe after years of telling their kids to watch out for him. Or maybe, they don't want the status quo disrupted. The community has been working fine without him; where will he fit? The story keeps describing him as “the man from whom the demons had gone”, and you get the sense that this will be his identity forever. “There's that guy who used to be demon possessed. Apparently, he's in his right mind now but you never can be too sure.” They don't seem ready to roll out the red carpet and welcome him home.

This guy seems to pick up on these vibes and begs Jesus, “Take me with you when you leave.” You'd think Jesus would say, “Yes, come follow me and live as my disciples.” That's pretty standard operating procedure for Jesus after all - “Leave everything behind and come with me.” Instead, Jesus tells him to return home to declare what God has done for him. So, it's not that Jesus doesn't want him to be a disciple. In fact, Jesus gives him the same charge that he gives the disciples later in Luke - to go and share the good news of God. Jesus just has a specific place in mind for where this guy will do this. He is sent back to his community.

It seems the healing process isn't over yet. There is more healing needed for the man and for his community, and so he is sent back. This man needs to learn how to tell a new story about his life in the midst of people who know the old story. He needs to claim that he is more than the bad things that have happened to him, the frightening things he has done. He has been set free. He's someone worthy of God's care, someone Jesus has charged with the important work of declaring the good news. As he tells this new story, he will experience more healing and more freedom.

But he isn't sent back just for his own sake. He's also sent for the sake of his community. For so long they've seen this man as other, as fearful, as *something* to keep locked away. They also need

to be freed from fear and suspicion. They need to be healed, for our soul is harmed whenever we view one of God's children as "other", as a thing. So, Jesus sends the man back to his community in order that they may all experience healing and restoration together.

The additional healing that happens for the man and for his community is where I see this story speaking most to our own stories. The whole demon possession, pigs hurling off cliffs to their death thing seems a bit removed from our own experience.

But learning to tell new stories about our lives - that's something that speaks to all of us. Each of us needs to hear that we are so much more than the bad things that have happened to us, the worst things we have done.

We are beloved of God. We are worthy of God's care. Jesus has come to forgive us and set us free. And God gives us each the important work of telling new stories and declaring what God has done for us. Most of our stories are not as dramatic as being healed from a legion of demons, but it's important that we share them, nonetheless.

This week at the book discussion we heard some of these stories from Good Shepherd members: After the divorce, I found I was not alone, God was carrying me, God was providing ... After I was widowed, God led me into deeper faith ... As I walk with my young adult son, I see how God is working through me to encourage and support him.

We need to tell these stories of what God has done for us, for we are healed as we do. What has God done in your life? Has God brought you out of loneliness and into community here? Has God softened your heart with a neighbor you too easily judged, opening up space for relationship? Has God worked in your discontent with one job to lead you into more purpose and meaning for your life?

Pay attention to what God has done and then tell about it- it will bring you healing. It will also help the rest of us. Especially in this time when we so often see people as the "other", when we label each other and demonize each other, we need to hear of what God is doing in people's lives.

We need to hear other people's stories to free us from our fear and suspicion. We need to be reminded, again and again, that there is more to someone than the worst thing that has happened to them, more than the worst thing they have done. We need to hear that God does not give up on us, that God is always working to set us free and give us new life.

God has sent you into this community today where you can hear that you are beloved and worthy, that you are forgiven and set free, that you, too, have a new story to declare.

Here in this place, among this community, may you share your stories, may you listen deeply to the stories of scripture and the stories of other people. May you know the healing that God gives to you and each of us today.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.