

many customers anymore and she is the only cleaning person there. Part of her pay is that she gets a room in almost the attic of the old place. She comes down every morning with a bucket and a mop, an old dress and old shoes and begins to clean. The hotel has a beautiful entry with a marble floor, a nice chandelier, and fine woodwork. Every day, she scrubs and polishes them all. Every night she goes up to that little room with her mop, her bucket, in the same old dress and same old shoes. In the morning she gets up and puts the same thing on and gets that old bucket and comes downstairs to clean. Same old same old. Sometimes her boss yells at her, "Hurry up! Go clean Room 33. What's wrong with you?" Sometimes when she is down on her hands and knees cleaning the marble floor people yell in the front door and make fun of her." a man walks in and says, "Pardon me, Miss but I'm a stranger in town and I'm looking for 420 Oak Street. Could you help me.?" She just stares at him. No one has been courteous to her for a long time. He continues, "I hate to interrupt you. My, this place is beautiful. It just shines! I know your boss must be proud of your work. Do you do this all by yourself?" She just stands there with her mouth open. He goes on to say, "My, that chandelier! Crystal. How do you keep it so sparkling clean? This really is marvelous work you are doing here." She just continues to look at him. She can't believe anyone is talking to her this way.

That night as she went up to the little room with her mop and bucket and old dress and old shoes, she goes over to the mirror and looks at herself. She pulls the rag off her head and shakes her hair and says, "I think I'll do my hair tonight." She goes over to a cardboard closet and says; "I think I'll wear this outfit tomorrow. I think I'll wear some different shoes. She picks up a bottle of perfume and says; "I think I'll wear this tomorrow."

You see it doesn't take much to cross over and cast out those demons that define others. It just takes God's people who will notice those God loves. Reminding them that no one is forgotten.



Trinity Baptist Church

4815 Six Forks Rd \* Raleigh, NC 27609 \* (919) 787-3740



# The Forgotten One

Luke 8:26-39

TRINITY PULPIT



All the lonely people, where do they all come from? That was the question asked by the Beatles' popular song several decades ago. The song goes on to describe lonely people, even a priest who prepares a sermon and a funeral where no one attends. In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam examines America's trend toward isolation from one another. Citing that more Americans are bowling now more than ever, however most of us choose not to bowl in a league. Citing study upon study, Putnam reveals our tendency toward individualism over community and the result of loneliness even though in many ways we are never alone.

It is true that more people than ever before surround us. Our houses are closer, our apartment buildings are bigger, and we are choosing to live in multi-family housing. We gather in coffee houses, but not to talk but to sit alone. Loneliness is one of the great scourges of modern culture.

John Ortberg writes:

*As much as we complain about it, though, there's part of us that is drawn to a hurried life. It makes us feel important. It keeps the adrenaline pumping. It means I don't have to look too closely at my heart or life. It keeps us from feeling our loneliness. ~ John Ortberg*

Philip Yancey writes:

*Mother Teresa, whose sisters in Calcutta, run both a hospice and a clinic for leprosy patients, once said, "We have drugs for people with diseases like leprosy. But these drugs do not treat the main problem, the disease of being unwanted. That's what my sisters hope to provide." The sick and the poor, she said, suffer even more from rejection than from material want. "An alcoholic in Australia told me that when he is walking along the street, he hears the footsteps of everyone coming toward him or passing him becoming faster. Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty."*

*One need not be a doctor or a miracle worker to meet that need. -- Philip Yancey, The Jesus I Never Knew (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 173.*

Loneliness is sometimes a choice we make and then of course loneliness is sometimes a condition that chooses us. That seems to be the case in the man Jesus encounters as He crosses the sea into the region of Genneseret.

Luke describes the scene with vivid details. Jesus arrives at the shore and to greet Him is a man that is described in these terms. He is someone who is not dressed. He had not lived in a house in a long time. He is described as demon possessed, and although he had been chained hand and foot he had been able to break away from those chains. He was a man who lived among the tombs.

Here is something else we know about this man. He was from the town. This was not an unknown man... he was a forgotten man. He had a name. He had a family. He had a community at one point, but no more. He was unable because of his condition to live a life that we might describe as normal. He was not dressed. He could not present himself as someone who was part of society or part of the culture. He was running around without clothing. Here was a man without the simplest of basics for living.

He is either without a home at this time, or he had chosen not to live in the home that might have been his. We are told he had not lived in a home in a long time. Two of the most basic necessities of life had eluded this man. He was without clothing and he was homeless.

We are told that he suffered from a condition. The man is described as demon possessed. As modern and post-modern people we are not sure what to do with demon possession. Some of us would dismiss it as ancient thinking in regards to illness whether physical or mental illness. Here is what we know from the Bible. Demon possession was believed to be real. Jesus deals with this man as though it is real.

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He casts the demons into the pigs. In fact, Jesus has a conversation with the demons. We do not have the time to delve into all that is involved in demon possession in the Bible, but we can say in this case there was an evil in this man's life. We can call it what we want, but the outcome was the same. The man was tormented and he was unable to control that which controlled him.

We are told that the demons were not just one, but they were many. They were legion. They were overpowering and the man essentially was controlled and being ruined by them.

Here is something else we know about this man. He had a caring community at one point. It may not sound like it, but I think the chains are an indication that someone cared. We are told that he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, but that he still could not be controlled. Who knows why they kept him chained hand and foot and under guard. There is one possibility that it was to protect the community. They did not know what he was capable of doing. They were afraid of him when the demons would seize him. They not only chained him to protect themselves and maybe even him. They also placed him under guard. They found someone to watch over him and to guard him from others and himself. Yet, here is the sad comment in the text.

Even though he is chained and kept under guard the demon would seize him and drive him to solitary places. Whatever it was that controlled this young man it was bigger than him, his family and his community. They tried but they could not help him. Instead of community this conduction continued to drive him to solitary places.

By the time Jesus meets him, this solitary place is among the tombs. What kind of life was this? Living among the tombs is another way of saying living among the dead. In other words, life was over and he was good as dead. His life was not going to be lived but purely survived. This young man's life was going to be like so many others in that it seems like a life wasted. There is no future or hope for this man. Life has dealt him a difficult existence and so instead of living he is already dying. He exists where death is all around. Almost as to remind him daily that this is not living.

There is one more thing about this man that catches our attention. It is when Jesus asks his name... the name replied is Legions. In others words, the man's condition has become his identity. Now I know you can argue that this is the demons speaking and not the man, but the voice is coming from the man. So, even as we struggle to understand this possession and who possesses whom, what we do know is that this man has reached the point that his whole personhood is defined by his condition.

We get the sad picture of this man as described by Luke. He is a man who is controlled by that which he cannot

control. He is a man who once was part of a community and now he is alone. He once lived in a house, but now he is living in the tombs. He once had those who tried to care for him, but now he is in a solitary place without care. In so many ways, he is the forgotten one.

He reminds us of so many in our world that are the forgotten ones. There of course are those whose lives have become solitary and lonely as the result of mental illness. Like this man, so many of us know those whose mental illness has driven them to a solitary place. Like those who tried to care for this man, so many of us have tried to care for those with mental illness, but simply found the situation too difficult. The truth is... there are many situations that bring even the most loving family and community to the place of being unable to help one they may have cared for.

There are other forgotten people in our world. There are those who are aged, sick, or different than others around them. So many people are simply forgotten and overlooked. They may have once had family, community and a future but now they are driven to solitary places.

We not only know people who are forgotten, but sometimes we are this person. Oh maybe not to the place of being homeless, naked and beyond control but many times we feel forgotten and we self identify with our condition. We are the unemployed, we are divorced, we are failures, we are confused, we are addicted, we are sick, we are afflicted and the list goes on. We are the forgotten one.

Here is the first thought about this text for us. We might define our lives by our condition, but Jesus defines us by God's love. No matter how we see ourselves and no matter how others might define us, what matters is how God defines us. God defines us as one who is loved and worth seeking after and rescuing. We need not be defined by what we possess or what on earth might possess us. We are defined as a precious possession of God.

To the man whose life had become what no one would expect of life or want from life, Jesus comes. It is interesting that so many of Jesus' stories begin with Jesus crossing over the sea to another region. Many lives are changed simply because Jesus crosses over. Jesus goes where others did not go. Jesus does not stay in one place, in one routine, in one situation. Jesus is constantly crossing over cultural, religious, ethnic and political line. Jesus crosses over.

In his book on evangelism, Bill Hybels suggest that evangelism begins with a "Walk Across the Room." He suggests that lives are changed when we simply walk across the room and engage others. It sounds simple, but the truth is it might be one of the hardest things we do and yet the most important. We need to cross over just like Jesus did. We are called to crossover cultural,

racial, political and even religious divides to help those who have been driven to solitary places.

Jesus crosses over and there He meets this man whose life is being ruined by this demon possession. Jesus could have passed him by. Jesus could have forgotten him, as it seems the others in his town have forgotten him. Yet, instead Jesus engages the situation. We take note that the demons recognize Jesus before anyone else. The demons know who Jesus is. The demons know they are no match for Jesus. They begin with acknowledgment of God's power and plead for mercy. Let us be cast not into the abyss, the place that was created for them, but instead into these pigs. The story they are cast into the pigs and the pigs run headlong off the cliff into the sea killing all the pigs.

This is one of those stories that sound more like a parable, but it is not. It is not a parable but rather what occurred. Just a reminder that some of the most incredible stories are those very moments that happen to us.

The man's whole condition and identity is changed. He goes from without clothes and homeless and literally out of his mind to being in sound mind, clothed and sitting quietly. His life is so changed that it is apparent to all.

Upon his healing, the man wants to go with Jesus. He pleads to go with the one who has given him life, but Jesus tells him to stay and tell others what God has done. You can't blame the man for wanting to leave. It has not been much of a life in this place. They had forgotten him and left him unattended in the tombs. Who would want to go back to a community like this? Yet, Jesus tells him to go back and tell what God has done for him.

It is reminder that being a witness to those who have always known us is sometimes harder than going somewhere new. Living a changed life with those who have known us before the change is difficult. Yet this is what the man is called to do.

However, the oddest action is the action of the pig herders and the town's people. Instead of rejoicing in the healing of the one who was once possessed they react in ways that seem very odd. First, there is the reaction of the pig herders. Instead of being excited for this person, they are angered that their living has been interrupted. This is a great story unless you are the pig herders or the

pigs.

Here is the second connection for us. Sometimes we are more comfortable with the way things are than the transforming power of God.

It sounds odd to us that someone would prefer the evil of demons over the healing of this young man. It sounds odd that they were more comfortable with the way things were instead of being opened to what Jesus could do. Or maybe not.

It is easy for us to get so comfortable with the way things are in life that we would prefer it to change, even change that might transform. The town's people and the pig herders come and beg Jesus to leave their district. They simply are saying thanks, but no thanks.

Is it true that we have become so accustomed to those who are overlooked or being overlooked that we don't expect anything to change and would not know what to do if it did? In fact, we might say thanks Jesus but no thanks.

Where do we see ourselves in this encounter with Jesus? Some of us might feel

forgotten, lonely, and wondering if anyone cares or notices us. We are just existing and surviving, but not really living. Does God care for me? Yes, Jesus not only crossed over the sea... He crossed over into our time and our existence and into our humanity because He came to show us the love and power of God. We might define ourselves by our condition, but Jesus defines us by His love.

We might find ourselves in the lives of the townspeople. We may be more worried about our financial welfare than the welfare of others. We might be so accustomed to the way things are that we fear any interruption from God. Yet, thanks be to God, Jesus interrupted this man's life and transformed it.

All the lonely people, where do they all come from? All the lonely, forgotten people, what are we to do? Let me suggest that this week we cross over. Just like Jesus, let us identify those in our lives who are forgotten by others or overlooked by others. What if we were to cross over?

*Fred Craddock tells of a young woman in a small Kansas town who had a job cleaning the old hotel. There were not*

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