

### CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Luke 8:26-39 June 20, 2010

Pilgrim Bud Precise

Jesus steps out of the boat “opposite Galilee.” He steps into a foreign land. And he steps into a life and-death drama. A Gerasene man runs to meet Jesus. He is in every way across polite, social boundaries. The man is what was called in that day – “unclean.” He is a man whose life is driven by a legion of demonic forces. He is an outcast.

The man lives in the tombs among the dead – a fitting symbol for his life. Society had no institution to help care for him. His family couldn’t care for him. The neighbors were worn out by him – he is cast out. He is naked. He is violent. He is unpredictable – so much so that the towns people have tried to shackle, to guard him. He is alone. And he is a Gentile – “opposite Galilee” means more than just a geographical location. This Luke text demonstrates one of the many ways Jesus crosses boundaries to show that no one is beyond Christ’s redeeming and healing love.

This is the only story in the Gospel of Luke that places Jesus beyond the boundary of his own land. The time will come when Jesus will speak to the disciples about witnessing in Jerusalem, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. But today’s text puts Jesus “opposite Galilee” and it serves to broaden the scope of what Christ is all about.

Our story today is a strange story in some ways. Jesus heals the man of his affliction. The demons are cast into a herd of swine that rush headlong over a cliff and fall into the sea. From Jesus’ point of view, being a good Jew, pigs are unclean. They are of no use to him. But the swine herders are not happy about losing their herd of swine. They are afraid. Why are they afraid? Jesus doesn’t seem to have the same power over people as he does with the demons. The people are surprisingly not overjoyed with Jesus’ healing. I suspect that they see that Jesus had disrupted their social order. They couldn’t cure or even contain the possessed man – but at least they were accustomed to him. They knew his place was out in the wild. They may be alarmed that this former demoniac comes among them. Even though he is cured, the social order to which they were accustomed was upset. It may not be the best social order, but it was familiar to them.

If we read this encounter with the man among the tombs in Matthew’s gospel, the story ends with the man healed and he disappears. But Luke includes the complicated aspects of the swine herders and the loss of their herd.

Our story does end on a lesson for us to learn today. The man asks Jesus if he can go with him – to share in this “itinerant” mission of Jesus. And we will remember that many times Jesus said, “Follow me.” But Jesus responds to this man “Return to your home and declare how much God has

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done for you.” Jesus sends the man to his own people to share the good news.” He steps into a land foreign to him. We know what it is to resist change and flee to the familiar. The text today calls us to examine those boundaries that need the light and healing power of the gospel. We can list those boundaries today – your list would be as long as mine. Immigration. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered. Color Education. Transportation. Religious. Age. Wealth or lack thereof. In our state, even the school you cheer for in football creates a boundary. There are boundaries of creation that we must attend to. How long and how much can we tolerate in the destruction of creation? When we read the creation stories, we understand our purpose is to “till the earth and keep it.” We are faced this very day with tragedy in the Gulf of Mexico. We do need oil for energy for transportation, power to run our factories and houses. We shake our heads at BP for their apparent lack of safety in taking care of off-shore drilling – and it looks like they are guilty in many ways. But to stop the greed of the oil companies, we must change the amount and the way we use energy. A part of the responsibility for “tending and keeping creation” belongs to us. We will need a new way of looking at and living in harmony with this earth. If not, we can destroy it, and may have well already destroyed the Gulf that is in our backyard.

There are boundaries that keep us. They bind us together as people of one world. These boundaries help us in our relationships and living together. To me, our text for today talks about boundaries. Robert Frost wrote in Mending Wall, “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall, that wants it down.” Some boundaries need to be taken down. Jesus points that out in our text for today. Our boundaries we create to separate us from those not like us need to be examined. Many of those boundaries have been with us far too long. It is time to take them down. When we use laws to put up boundaries that discriminate, then it is time for us to join together to remove them. Jesus left his comfort zone today when he went into a foreign land. Crossing boundaries will cause us to do the same as we try to create a just, caring, inclusive society. Today, we are indebted to people in the past who have helped remove boundaries that puts one group over another by class, color, sexual orientation, language. Our text calls us to examine our boundaries. That may mean we will need to step out on the “Opposite shore.” We can identify those “People living in the tombs” today. God grant us the courage and the will to reach beyond those boundaries with the healing power of the gospel.