

God's Call

a sermon preached on the

4th Sunday after Pentecost

20 June 2010

at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

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Luke 8:26-39

Every three years all those holding the Bishop's licence (Lay or Ordained) are compelled to attend a workshop on boundaries and political correctness. I attended one such session last Thursday, and when preparing my sermon for today I began to think about how greatly life has changed from over two thousand years ago to what it is today in so called western civilisation. By today's standards, Jesus crossed a lot of boundaries according to Luke's narrative of the Gospel story.

Firstly the Gospel referred to this demented man as being possessed by a multitude of demons, where as in today's world he would quite rightly be treated to enable him to live out a productive lifetime. Then what about these dear little pigs! Luke tells us that Jesus gave his permission for the supposed demons to exit the man, and enter the pigs. This prompted the poor things to commit suicide by jumping over the cliff and drowning in the river below. I have a lot of sympathy for the pigs! Here they are innocently walking around grunting and grazing, and out of nowhere comes a swarm of demons who drive them to death. Where was the officer from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries when all this was happening!

The bizarre thing about this story is that it was all happening in a foreign country. Jesus and his disciples crossed the border by travelling across the lake of Galilee to the shores of the Geransenes. No border control there! No security guards! The leader of the Green Party would have been in his element.

Another bizarre thing about this Gospel story is that while this poor fellow was running around the cemetery breaking his chains and terrorising all and sundry. It would appear that the villagers were a lot more concerned *after* he was healed. They had heard the account from the herdsmen. They were not at all grateful. After all they had lost part of their livelihood with the drowning of the pigs, and they were not sure of what things Jesus would do next, so they asked Jesus to go away. They did not want to hear or see anymore of his strange behaviour. So Jesus and the disciples got back into the boat and prepared to leave.

Then it happens! The man who was healed from his illness wants to go with Jesus! Here he is standing on the shore with Jesus and his disciples in the boat in front of him, and the villagers who banned him to the graveyard at his back. He wants to go with the person who healed him, the person who was not afraid to come near him, the one who didn't cross to the other side of the street. He is ready to follow Jesus to the end of the earth. Jesus said, "No!" To others of His followers, Jesus had issued the invitation- "Come and follow me", but to this man he said – "Return to your home and tell the people all that God has done for you".

This Gospel is not simply of one person's healing, but a story of a "calling" from God. In this case the "call to ministry" involves "staying" rather than "leaving". This scenario, can be very true for us all - what we may see, and want, as our ministry, may not be what God wants, and we, in humility, have to accept God's will, no matter how difficult that is for us personally.

God, who is constantly in the process of re-shaping our lives, issues a variety of calls in a variety of places. No matter where we are "called" or what we are "called to do", each of us is a disciple of Christ, and as such, obedient to His will. When we are "called", how we are "called", where we are "called" are part of God's plan. The liberated man wanted his "call" to take him away from his home, but Jesus said, "Stay". Amen.