

“What Have You To Do With Me, Jesus?”

Luke 8:26-39

6/6/10

Jesus Christ = transformation. We need not be afraid to accommodate that kind of radical change, but embrace the power Jesus Christ has in our lives to break the shackles which bind us.

Dr. George Sweeting, President of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, tells of the day he noticed an unusual combination of bumper stickers on the car of a man who was visiting the school. The coincidental message conveyed by the two stickers prompted Dr. Sweeting to suggest to the unsuspecting visitor that he might want to remove one of them. One read: JESUS IS COMING! and the other: ESCAPE TO WISCONSIN.

Maybe a coincidence for that guy, or maybe he really fears Jesus' return into this world. Sometimes our fears seem small, sometimes they're life and death. What do you most fear in life? For some it is spiders they fear the most. For others it's death, or the dark, or being alone. Maybe that's a question you can answer easily, maybe it's one that causes you to dig down deep into places in your life you don't go to very often. When I was working at Philhaven Hospital, one of the doctors there was asking all the staff a question he was trying to answer for himself. And so he came to me and asked, "Pete, how much of your life do you think is controlled by fear?"

What about Jesus? Do you fear Him? "What a silly question", you may say. "Fear Jesus, c'mon!" But not so silly to the Geresenes, those who encountered Jesus one life-transforming day.

Just think of the scene before the people of that country. They all knew of the demoniac. They tried to keep him under control by chaining him down and placing a guard to watch over him. But none of that worked. Then one day they get wind of some Man who comes from across the sea and does the impossible—He completely heals the demoniac. They go to see for themselves, and sure enough, there sits a calm, clothed, and cured man at Jesus' feet, and an entire herd of their pigs drown in the sea.

I can't imagine what the people were thinking when they saw this. "Wow! This is incredible! I want to meet this Man who could do such an amazing thing." No. They ask Jesus to leave. They ask Him to go! Why in the world would they ask Jesus to leave them when they have just witnessed the most amazing act of power of their lives? Fear. Luke tells us that they were afraid, that they were seized with great fear.

First of all, they just lost a lot of money due to Jesus' actions. All those swine that were sent into the sea represented the livelihood of the people who lived in that country. If Jesus did that, then what else is He going to do to their way of life? But I think there is something much more profound going on here than the people simply fearing the loss of more money.

The Geresenes recognize the mystery and the power of what has taken place between Jesus and the demoniac, but they cannot make a place for it or accommodate it in their lives. Their thinking was like ours probably can be sometimes: If Jesus did that for the demoniac, if He has that kind of power and brought that kind of radical change to this man's life, than what is Jesus going to do in our lives? What's Jesus going to do to me? "What have you to do with me, Jesus?"

As Jesus has made clear in His message to us,

We are all always welcome at Jesus table.

Yet, today we encounter what can be the real challenging part of going before Jesus, that: **As we are welcomed we are also transformed.**

That is a truly wonderful thing! But as we dig deeper and are honest with ourselves as to what really needs changed in our lives, this message takes on a much more radical sound. Maybe a sound that isn't pleasant to our comfortable ears.

Michelle Akers, by the time she was in college, had become an All-American soccer star, earning ESPN's woman athlete of the year in 1985—the same year the United States formed its first women's national team, with Michelle a starter. In 1991 the U.S. team won the first-ever Women's World Cup and Michelle scored 10 goals in five games, including the championship's winner.

But just as her star was rising, Michelle's health was declining. By 1993, the woman who used grit and determination to make life happen found her life unmanageable. Michelle says, "Each day I felt like I had flown to Europe with no food or sleep, then flown right back and trained for hours". She suffered from Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS), a debilitating disease affecting more than a million adult Americans.

Akers says, "When it was really bad, I couldn't sit up in a chair. I was so sick I couldn't take a five-minute walk without needing two days on the couch to recover. I was forced to spend a lot of time thinking about who I was. I didn't like what I saw." Michelle had put her trust in Christ as a high-school student, but ignored God in college and after graduation. Now sick and alone from a failed marriage, Michelle reluctantly accepted an invitation from a strength coach to attend his church. Although she couldn't articulate it at the time, in retrospect Michelle says she knew she "needed to get things right with God."

"Looking back," she explains, "I think God was gently, patiently tapping me on the shoulder and calling my name for years. But I continuously brushed Him off, saying, 'Hey, I know what I am doing. I can make these decisions. Leave me alone.'" She says, "It took total devastation before I would acquiesce and say, 'Okay, God. You can have my life. Please, help me.'"

How far do we allow ourselves to go before we truly allow Christ to transform our lives, to enter into those areas of our lives where we like to have control, where we like the way things are, where changing seems to be too enormous of a task? If we truly look honestly into our lives, how often do we say to God, "No, No. I like things just the way they are. Yeah, I have some things in my life that could be better, I'm not perfect. But I don't need that kind of change. If I allow Jesus to do that to me, then what am I going to have to give up? Oh Jesus, please, please don't make me change like that! Please, just go away. I don't want to have to deal with all of that stuff."

When Jesus comes to our lives, He brings with Him tremendous power, to heal and comfort, but that also means change. He will not leave us the same way we were before He arrived in our lives. It's about giving it all over to Him, not just some parts of our lives. What areas in our lives do we cling to a little tighter than others, places where we care not to make room for or accommodate Jesus, places where, when Jesus arrives, we simply ask Him to leave? "What have you to do with me, Jesus?" Maybe that's the question we fear the most. Because there is action in those words.

Colin Smith, pastor in Arlington Heights, IL, says, "I have vivid memories as a kid of my father taking me to an auction sale, telling me, 'Don't scratch your nose at the wrong time, son.'"

He said to me, ‘Always remember this: whenever you go to an auction sale, make sure you know your upper limit price.’”

The great danger for us is that we walk into the Christian life knowing clearly our upper limit price. Jesus does not allow us to set that. *“If you save your life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for my sake and the gospel's, you will keep it,”* said Jesus.

Our calling is to a life of unconditional obedience where the price is unknown.

Our need to be in charge of ourselves, others, and situations often makes our relationship with Christ life's biggest power struggle. We are reluctant to relinquish our control and allow Him to run our lives. We may believe in Him and be active in the church and Christian causes, but trusting Him as Lord of everything in life can be scary.

Even though we pray about our challenges and problems, all too often I think what we really want is strength to accomplish what we've already decided is best for ourselves and others. Meanwhile we press on with our own priorities and plans. We remain the script writer, casting director, choreographer, and producer of the drama of our own lives, in which we are the star performer.

“What have you to do with me, Jesus?” That question had greater implications than the demon-possessed man or anyone else could have ever imagined. Because he was not only healed by Jesus, but he also became one of the first evangelists to the Gentiles.

“What have you to do with me, Jesus?” Asking that question will have greater implications than you will ever imagine. But in Jesus Christ it is always for the good. He only wants to make us whole, to give us life, and to give it abundantly. It is never something we need to fear, but to embrace. And never does the transformation Jesus creates in our lives only involve us.

Asking, “What have you to do with me, Jesus?”, means that part of the answer we receive will involve doing something for Christ.

For some of us, that may be the scarier dimension of giving our lives completely to Christ. Because when we do, the focus of our relationship with Christ never stays fixed on ourselves. Jesus directed the man whom He healed to go and declare to all the people what God had done for him. The man wanted to stay with Jesus, and it's no wonder. After experiencing a healing power of the magnitude that he did, who wouldn't want to stay with Jesus and continue to praise Him. But now Jesus directed the man's praise outward, for others to experience, so they too could experience Jesus' amazing transforming power.

When we give ourselves completely to Christ, He calls us to go back into the world and share with everyone what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. “What have you to do with me, Jesus?” “Go and share it with others”, is always part of His answer to us.

“What have you to do with me, Jesus? That can be scary. That may mean I have to do something different. That may mean Christ's Church, Oakland, may have to do some things differently. But, when Christ leads, amazing things happen. For, as much as Christ's power will transform our lives and heal us from all our sin and brokenness, so He will also give us the power to do what He calls us to do.

Barbara Brown Taylor says, “When the hot word of God is poured over a cold, cold world, things break, and it is into that brokenness that we are called, into whatever big or small piece we find in front of us, with fire in our bones, to show a frightened world that it is not the heat of fire that we fear, but the chill that lies ahead if the fire goes out.”

Jesus sent the man back into his country to tell them all that God had done for him. He had to go back, so that he could assure them that the cleansing, transforming fire of Jesus is something not to be feared, but to embrace.

“What have you to do with me, Jesus?”, is the question we should begin each day with. How are You going to change me today and how am I going to be a part in changing someone else’s life for You? What have You to do with me, Jesus?

Invitation to anointing.