

Luke 8:26-39

Think back, who was it that brought you to the faith? There most likely was someone who taught you what it is like to belong to a community of believers. The demon possessed man from Gerasenes was most likely responsible for many people coming to follow Jesus.

I may have told you before that I was at a conference where we were advised to tell our sticky stories. What's a sticky story? It's a story not unlike the demon possessed man, although I rather doubt any of our stories can be that compelling. Can you imagine living your life chained, controlled by demons who are strong enough to break those chains? Then a man comes with a few other men, and the demons recognize him and don't want to be cast back into the abyss. So they beg Jesus to enter into a herd of swine. Jesus had compassion even on the demons, but I'd say not on the pigs. Pigs were an unclean animal that were not to be eaten by Jewish laws, and Jesus was a Jew. I've always wondered what happened to those demons once the pigs ran off the edge of the cliff and drown. Anyway, what a sticky story the once demon possessed man had to tell. He was completely saved from a life of exile, of solitary isolation, because Jesus came into his life. He wanted to follow Jesus, to go with him back across the Sea of Galilee, to be a disciple but Jesus told him, "No, you go home and tell people what God has done for you."

If you look at magazines and internet articles you can find a lot of conversion stories about people who were living sinful lives then Jesus came to them and they repented and began living life in a new way. One time I did a prison ministry called Kairos where a team of women went into the SCI Cambridge Springs for the weekend presenting them a Koinonia type experience. If you haven't heard of Koinonia, or Walk to Emmaus, it is a weekend retreat for spiritual renewal and formation including singing, learning, praying and small group discussions. The inmates had to pay \$1.00 for this experience... when you're in prison \$1.00 is a lot of money. There was one woman who told the story how she wanted to come in the worst way but her account was empty. Someone convinced her to sign up anyway, and miraculously there was \$1.00 in her account to cover the weekend. I'd like to think lives were changed that weekend, but most of the women who attended were already believers. Yet the leaders who gave presentations told their stories of conversion. The demons who possessed them were nothing like the demons that possessed the man of Gerasenes, yet there were tales of drug and alcohol addiction from which Jesus had rescued them. And these were God fearing Christian women whom I'd never have guessed had sticky stories.

There is great concern about the church in America today, where are all the people, especially the young people? What is going to happen to the church, will it exist in the future? Yet throughout the biblical history there have always been those whom God has rescued or kept so that his story never ends. Today's reading from Isaiah tells of how God was rejected by the people, and because of their rejection they will be sent into exile, yet God promises there will be a few of his chosen saved to carry on the faith. To tell of God's deeds to their children and their children's children.

The reading from Galatians tells us that those who believe in Christ are children of Abraham, heirs of the promise of Abraham, ones who will be delivered from slavery and be given a land to claim as their own. Those who will share their story with their children and their children's children.

Yet there are those children and their children who do not want to hear the stories any longer. Who have decided that church isn't what they were led to believe it is... those who have experienced the judgement of people who have decided that they don't meet the standards, or they have heard stories from their friends who have experienced the judgement of the self-righteous. It's like the swine herders who lost their pigs, they can't see the positive because they've lost what they perceived belongs to them. So they send Jesus away, or in today's case, they turn away from Jesus. They have sticky stories of a different kind, one's that are negative. And negative stories are listened to more readily than positive ones. I know every time I look for a hotel I go to the reviews and if there is a really negative review, I choose not to stay at that hotel. So it makes sense that when people experience rudeness or hear stories of being treated rudely in a church they won't attend that church.

But God always keeps a remnant of believers. There are still young persons going into ministry. There are still a young persons who believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. And there are still believers who are sharing their stories. Maybe yours isn't some amazing conversion story because you've been raised in the church, known no other life than coming to church, and grown in your faith through the years. In her book "Here Goes Nothing: An Introvert's Reckless Attempt to Love Her Neighbor" Kendra Broekhuis tells the story of how she shares all that Jesus has done for her in her small interactions in a parking lot, a laundromat or a knock on the neighbors' door. One the vignettes she shares is her remembrance of a sermon when the preacher asked "Would your neighborhood miss you tomorrow if you were gone? Would the surrounding community miss your church if it ceased to be tomorrow?" She goes on to say, "If you are unsure of the answer to those questions, then maybe it's time to do some reflection on how to get to know those around you. Once you get to know your neighbors and have a relationship with them, then you can truly serve them and hopefully introduce Christ to them.

The way to share Christ with others is, according to Broekhuis, to really explore your own personal faith so that you do know how to share it with others when your conversations reach that point. Being raised in the church you think you don't have a sticky story, that there isn't anything you can share. Broekhuis disagrees. She asks: How have you seen the Lord change you? What do you struggle with that you have to give up to God? Most all of us have faced struggles with worry, control, pride and selfishness. Sharing how we have learned through our faith to recognize those sins and how faith has helped us to turn away from those sins is a sticky story.

Listening for the promptings of the Holy Spirit to share our story of how Jesus has shaped our life is the key. The Holy Spirit will move us past our fear of rejection, realizing that even if someone walks away from us, we have at least planted a seed. That is all we are responsible for doing. We share our story, even if it isn't of how Jesus miraculously cast demons out of us into a herd of swine. One of the sayings from the Kairos ministry talks is "Make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to Christ". We plant, the Holy Spirit waters and God grows. In God's own time. Be a part of the remnant who bring others to Jesus so they can know his miraculous love, a love which knows no boundaries.

All glory be to God.