

Luke 8:26-39

Happy Father's Day!

So what's your name?

So what reading do we have today...The story of Naked Dirty Bloody Guy... one of my favorite stories!

Luke Chapter 8 begins with Jesus telling the parable of the seeds, sowing the word of God into the world...without regard to where they fall...among thorns, rocks anywhere at all. Then Jesus tells them not to hide their light under a bushel...but be the light of the world...YOU show up...YOU be the witness to God's grace and love in this world.

Then we have this strange healing story right at the end. Jesus once again teaches his disciples first by words, the parables, and then he lives them out in action! Jesus always walks the talk by living out His parables. So here they go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee – gentile territory where those foreigners live.

Now the city of Gerasa was a major city since its founding, and during the Roman period it was one of the ten cities known as the Decapolis... It was a Roman stronghold. Here Jesus meets an outcast to both the Jews and Romans alike. A naked, demon possessed, guy living among the tombs there - a man who literally and figuratively was dead to the world...dead to all.

A nobody, of no consequence, to anyone at all. A no show! He is naked and dirty and bloody! And this is how and where Jesus meets him.

I wonder how we would greet Naked Dirty Bloody Guy if he walked through that door right now...and I wonder how radically inclusive we would all be when facing the ultimate outcast?

It's challenging isn't it to change our cultural well-worn points of view? What labels do we place on people...who has value? What's in a name? How many titles and letters are in front of or after your name? And what if you had NO name and belonged to NO group...would you even exist! Last

week we talked about MEs being alone and isolated...disconnected from the whole.

We can easily lose sight of our true Father and Mother as we are given limits by our biological ones. It's a paradox isn't it...as soon as we are born we belong and are given labels to capture our sense of self and of who we are...You are given a NAME...and that starts this idea of who you belong to

For me: Mary and Carmen, so I'm Italian, and I'm born in America so I'm American, then you are from Philly, and I am a first born, male, middle class and white, Roman Catholic etc etc...all these labels define for me who I am and I had no choice in these things...then we have rituals we follow in order to gain a sense of self, worth and belonging...that's why at Baptism it's traditional to give you a new name. (usually your middle name).

...and we also first learn about God from our parents, from their rules and their rituals, but the paradox here is that in order to evolve we must at some point break free and transcend those very same labels that previously defined our sense of self... we must then die to our own carefully constructed ego, so as not to limit ourselves or to become "stuck in a rut"... stuck in a limited view of an unlimited God!

In order to live as Jesus commands, we must include everyone inside the wall, inside the picture frame...and that means everyone on our planet, all of God's creations.

In order to see God's will for us we must transcend our will for ourselves, for our families, for our communities, for our state, for our country, for our planet...for God never placed these boundaries to divide us...they don't even exist! In all the plane trips I have ever taken I have never seen boundaries drawn on our planet.

As long as we see things from a tribal point of view then Jesus' message to us will tend to divide us...But when we instead start to transcend our prejudices, our labels and our tribal thinking, then and only then, will we see how God

unites us all under a God big enough to encompass all of her children!
Welcome all to God's One Holy Family!

Now naming in the Bible gave you a purpose and gave you belonging, just like it does for us today! But what if you had NO name at all! Enter Naked Dirty Bloody Guy!

On one of my trips to Israel, my roommate was a prison psychologist from Canada - Michel. And we were standing in the exact spot where this story took place...overlooking the site where Jesus had encountered Legion the man who was demon possessed...Note that the first thing Jesus does in the story is ask the man his name...So Michel begins to relate a similar experience he had...In the prison where he worked at he was asked to meet with someone that was known to him only as "the animal".

He was shackled and kept in isolation and that was what everyone called him there. Upon his first meeting with the animal Michel asked that he meet with the prisoner alone and that the restraints be removed...probably not such a good idea he was told.

When the prisoner arrived he was shackled and surprisingly small yet it took six men to get him there. He was covered head to toe in tattoos. The first thing that my friend did was ask the man his name...and immediately he said "the animal"...then my friend asked him again what is your name...the name you were given by your parents... not the one given to you by the world.

And after he told my friend His name, Michel saw the labels and the shackles visibly dissolve in the man's face as he began to remember who he was...and this started the beginning of a beautiful friendship and an amazing transformation! As he told us this story in this ancient place there was not a dry eye too be found among the 40 of us...The gospel story then and now!

You see this man throughout His story was dehumanized and he began to believe all the stories that others told about him...he had forgotten who he

was. He forgot he was even human...he forgot his worth...He didn't have a name...

So what's your name? A loving intimate way to invite others into the family of God...ask folks their name!

So Jesus heals and transforms this guy by first asking his name and then casting out legion (the name given to him in the kingdom of man)...and no legion wasn't as much the name of the demon but rather "the legion" (it only meant one thing back then)... the demon that was the Roman Empire and the Roman army (a legion was around 5000 troops) and a legion was actually stationed there.

Here the demons are the results of the kingdom of man...violence and oppression to keep those in power in power...boy does that sound familiar! Here America...I mean Rome decides who has worth and who does not!

And this large number of swine would have been there for sacrifices to the gods at the temple there and I believe these pigs were actually there destined for Zeus and that would have very been a big deal... that's why everyone all of a sudden becomes afraid...Jesus is stirring up the big boys!

So Jesus with this one worthless and outcast man with no name...speaks against the power of the institution, the system of political power and might, and the head of their false gods all in one fell swoop...and he does all of this through someone of no consequence and No value to anyone...Naked, Dirty, Bloody Guy.

But Jesus doesn't see value and worth as we do... does He? Thank God! Jesus focus' squarely on the kingdom of God right in front of him...here in the eyes of Naked Dirty Bloody Guy...Here Jesus sees a human being made in the image and likeness of God! And in God's eyes worth is measured by your heart not by your labels and possessions...

Jesus is never interested in the trappings of your life...you can't earn grace! You have already been given it! You are ALL worthy...you are ALL loved... wherever and however you are!

So Jesus heals this guy... and now of course like anyone who just experienced a miracle...what would you do...like a moth to the flame he now wants to follow Jesus...so that they could all live happily ever after...and isn't that the goal... to follow Jesus and live happily ever after!

But that's not how this story ends is it is it?

Instead Jesus leaves this man behind with all this baggage that goes with it and he tells him to go and be a living witness to God's power, mercy, love and God's amazing grace right here in the very place you are outcast from.

To complete Luke Chapter 8... this living parable...The seed has been sown...the lamp has been lit! Here it's not even about Jesus...but rather about You and God's grace working in your life... and then being able to share your story with others in your community... right where you are!

Now later in the Gospels when Jesus returns to this area people are now there in droves to meet Jesus! Mmmmm...How is it that they knew about Jesus' love and healing power?!

I have had the privilege of standing in the place where this story happened. You can still see the caves and tombs up in the hills, and you can see the hillside where the swine met their end. But what is miraculous about this Hellenistic site is that we stood atop the ruins of one of the earliest known 2nd century Christian churches. This one man spread God's word and witness in his life and the entire city was transformed for centuries...for centuries... and we still are witnessing it today!!

What could one man, plagued by the demons of this world, humiliated and naked for all to see, dirty with his circumstances, bloodied by the weight of

the world...what could this one man do after just one afternoon...one afternoon... after having an encounter with Jesus?

What could one person do just by showing up and allowing God to work through them? Do any of us here ever feel crazy, mad, shackled, naked, dirty or bloodied? Do any of us ever feel like we just want to leave the world behind and go off into our own little caves where no one will find us?!

Does anyone here know how important showing up is? Can you guess how important you are in the formation of your children or your church or even your country...just by showing up?

What does it mean to remember your true name and then to show up as a witness... and when you do show up...growing healthy communities and churches follow...be Naked Dirty Bloody Guy!

We may not be able to fix all that is broken in the world... but being a Christian who is present for their family and neighbors will witness the very love of God in their homes and in their neighborhoods.

And at times... we will get crazy, angry, dirty, bloody, humiliated. It's at these times when we just want to retreat and escape. But here Jesus says NO! Go back and show them what God has done for you! Go back to your homes, go back to your families, and go into your communities.

BE role models, BE witnesses...witness and share your stories! BE present to your own life and the world will change around you!

I know this morning I probably “preaching to the choir” ...and for that I want to thank you all...’Cause you all showed up here today!

Thank you for showing up! And on behalf of us all - I want to thank you for showing up in the lives of your families, your church and your communities as well!

Because of Naked, Dirty, Bloody Folks just like us, we can all witness and brush up against the kingdom of God right here this morning...

So always remember your name...No...not the name the world has given you... but rather the name your eternal parent has given you...For you are all children of God and your name is...Holy... your name is Worthy...and you are love!

Always Show Up and Be... Love!

Yfs,

carmen