

## How Much!?!

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 8:26-39

*How much!?!* We can say that as an exclamatory phrase. Look *how much* that dress costs! We can say it as a question, *how much* do you love me? A fellow that I went to college with who was quite the jokester once put his undying love up for auction on Ebay. In effect he was asking the question, “*How much* is my love worth to you?” The question and the exclamatory phrase, *how much* bring about different kinds of responses. We may have experience with this in our own lives. In our Gospel reading Jesus says, “Return to your home, and declare *how much* . . .” (Lk 8:39). That is, *how much* God has done for you!

Jesus is Lord over all things. Jesus is Lord even over the things that are opposed to him. This is what we see in our Gospel reading this morning. In ancient times the sea was viewed as chaos, something out of control and un-tamable. The violent action of the wind and the waves out on the open seas and the volatile action of sea squalls and storms were something to be greatly feared. Our Gospel reading begins with the phrase, “They sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee” (Lk 8:26). Jesus and his disciples just crossed the sea. They just finished confronting chaos. We learn that they were swept up in a mighty storm during their journey across the Sea of Galilee. The disciples predictably were very afraid. In their fear they turned to one who they thought could calm the chaos. And with a Word Jesus showed that he is Lord over the chaos. See *how much* he is in control.

After Jesus and his disciples land safely in the land of the Geresenes, our Lord witnesses more chaos. A man from the city who was possessed by demons and unclean spirits met him. This was a man who was overcome by chaos. His appearance and lifestyle could not deny it. He wore no clothes and he had not lived in a house but had even lived among the dead in tombs! The demons and unclean spirits that possessed this man were in direct opposition to the Lordship of Jesus. And the demons and unclean spirits know that Jesus is Lord over them and has come to still the chaos they bring. The unclean spirits even speak to Jesus, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, the Son of the Most High God?” (Lk 8:28). Just as Jesus calmed the chaos for the disciples who were caught in the middle of it on the Sea of Galilee, so also out of great compassion and care for this boy, Jesus calms the chaos and shows his lordship over it, driving them out of the boy and into a herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby (Lk 8:32-33). See *how much* he is in control. See *how much* God shows his lordship for the benefit of people.

When Jesus casts out the demons the people of the surrounding country see and respond. They witness Jesus showing his Lordship over the chaos. They witness Jesus casting out the demons and unclean spirits in this boy. And they are afraid. They see *how much* control Jesus has and the damage he has done to the herd of pigs and they are filled with fear and cast him out. They ask Jesus to leave from their midst. Imagine that Jesus just healed a man of unclean spirits and restored him to health again and the people seek to drive him out. We see here that the people showed a greater concern for pigs and possessions than people and the health of a person. Through their actions they show *how much* they reject what God has done. They show *how much* they reject Jesus and his lordship.

What are we showing others about what we love and care for most and *how much* we love and care for it? Perhaps there are times that we get so consumed about possessions and things that we may forget about people. We might call it the “plastic sofa syndrome.” On the television show *Everybody Loves Raymond*, the mother of Ray Barone, Marie, had the same sofa in her living room for decades. Not only that but she had the same sofa covered with the same plastic for decades. What does this communicate to her children and guests? Whether intentional or not, it could communicate that the possessions and the condition of them are more important than the people who use them! This seemed to be the impression that the people in the Gospel lesson gave as they respond negatively to having lost a herd of swine. The restoration of the community through the restored health of this young man took a backseat to dead pigs! St. Paul speaks about the sinful condition of people and the fallen state of humanity and can say in his letter to the Romans, “They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles...” and “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator...” (Ro 1:23, 25). Do we respond in ways similar to the people in the country of Gerasenes? Through our actions and behavior what do we show others about who and *how much* we love others and care for them?

The healed man in the Gospel reading had a different response. This man had been tortured by unclean spirits and demons. When the demons left him for the pigs he experienced “release and freedom.” He experienced Jesus showing his lordship over the chaos. And he begged for Jesus to stay. The other townspeople seek to perform their own exorcism by casting Jesus out while the healed young man longs for Jesus to stay. He experienced *how much* God had done for him and he then longed for others to experience *how much* God has done and can do for them. In contrast to the townspeople’s response, this young man cared for the health of the *other people*. He shared Jesus’ compassion.

*How much* God cares about his creation and the people he created. *How much* God loves and has compassion even for the people that intentionally or unintentionally seek to cast him out through words and actions that show greater love for possessions than people. God has sent Jesus to still the chaos. He has done this by casting his Son out, giving him our place as the one who is caught and captured. God, the Father allowed Satan to show *how much* he thinks he is Lord. He bound Jesus by nails to a cross. He placed a crown of thorns upon this Lord. Through Jesus God showed his lordship. He showed *how much* Satan is wrong. He cast Satan down through his resurrection three days later. God has bound Satan. He has defeated sin, death, and all that is opposed to God. He has showed his victory. He has shown great love, mercy, and compassion for *people* to forgive even our most unintentional attempts to oppose him and his work and lordship. *How much* God has done for you!

Jesus told the man, “No.” The healed man wanted Jesus to stay with him and in the town to heal others. Through his actions, Jesus told the man, “No.” Jesus said to the man, “You go and speak of *how much* God has done for you.” That will be enough. Then Jesus left just as abruptly as he came. We have received the mercy and compassion and grace of our Lord, just as that healed man had received. God has released you from Satan’s grip and all that would hold you captive. Let us live as released and free people under his Lordship. Let us continue to show and share *how much* God has done for us. Amen.