

Luke 8:26–39

There are ways to introduce sermons that get the listener's attention. And there are some things pastors do not want to say, statements like "I need to make a confession." That is a statement we just don't want to hear, do we? Well, the confession I have may not be a juicy one, like those we hear on TV, but it has to do with the writing of this sermon. You see, in seminary, one is taught in homiletics to do exegesis. Now exegesis is a fancy word that means study of a particular text. The process involves prayer, historical criticism, and Holy Spirit to lift out the message. During the exegesis a pastor or preacher will encounter the message's theme that the congregation needs to hear; Notice that it is a message that NEEDS to be heard, and not want the congregation WANTS or LIKES to hear. We are taught to do exegesis before writing the sermon.

Now the opposite of exegesis is eisogesis. The preacher wants to avoid eisogesis because that is where personal agendas are pushed on a listener. Eisogesis is not good because the sermon writer is entering the biblical text looking for a particular message to proclaim. Are you with me on this distinction? Exegesis is good because the Holy Spirit brings the message the congregation needs to hear, and eisogesis is bad because the preacher is going to the text with an agenda. Here is my confession.

My agenda on this is Father's Day was to look into this text looking for a message to proclaim that would be relevant to this day we honor fathers. OK, so CNN did not camp out for an interview at my house this morning to get a first hand, provocative interview.

But maybe you are starting to see the predicament I am in, "How does one connect the healing of the demoniac man with father's day?" There is a joke in there somewhere, but I best move on!

One connection I thought of was in verse 32. The text reads, "Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission." I thought about this part, "Jesus gave them permission," Well, father's give permission to their children. The dads in this assembly have needed to weigh the dangers of allowing children to be responsible; to choose friends that are not destructive. That can be hard for fathers to say. They have needed to trust that their teen would operate automobiles safely. Yes, fathers are constantly faced with the risks of giving permission, but this particular avenue for the sermon can be problematic because, after all, Jesus is giving permission to demons. Not a good comparison for our children. Or is it... No better not go there either!

So to divert from the gospel lesson for just a moment I wanted to read you something from a man by the name of Victor Miller. He writes down his thoughts while driving his child to school.

"Morning, Kid. You look pretty sharp today. Your hair his kind of long and scruffy around the ears, a style I did not attempt until college but I would recognize you anyway by who you are. You and I have gotten used to one another...

Now that you are eight I notice I don't see a whole lot of you anymore. On our last 3 day weekend you slept in and by the time I came home you were out with your neighborhood friends. I saw you for about 45 seconds at lunch and you reappear for supper at five. I miss you, but I know you have serious business to take care of. Certainly as serious as or more important than, the things the other commuters on the road are doing.

After all, you've got to grow up and out and that's more important than clipping coupons, arranging stock options, or selling people short. You have got to learn what you are able to do and what you aren't – and you've got to learn how to deal with that. You've got to learn about people and how they behave when they don't feel good about themselves – like the bullies who hang out at the bike rack and hassle the smaller kids. Yeah, you'll even have to learn how to pretend that name calling doesn't hurt. It will always hurt, but you'll have to put up a front or they'll call you worse names next year. One of my hopes is that you remember how it feels – in case you ever decide to rank a kid who's smaller than you.

When was the last time I told you I was proud of you? I guess if I can't remember, I've got work to do. I do remember the last time I yelled at you- told you we'd be late if you didn't hurry-but, on balance I say that I haven't given you as many pats as I have yells. For the record, in case you read this, I am proud of you. I especially like your independence, the way you take care of yourself even when it frightens me just a little bit. You have never been much of a whiner and that makes you a superior kid in my book.

Why is it that fathers are so slow to realize that eight-year-olds need as many hugs as four year olds? If I don't watch out, pretty soon I'll be punching you on the arm and saying, "Whattya say, Kid?!" instead of hugging you and telling you I love you. Life is too short to hide affection. How can it be that eight-year-olds are so slow to realize that 36-year-olds need as many hugs as four-year-olds?

Did I forget to tell you that I'm proud that you went back to a box lunch after one week's worth of indigestible hot lunch? I'm glad you value your health and your body.

I wish this drive was not so short...I want to tell you about last night...your younger brother was asleep and we let you stay up a little later to watch the ball game. Those times are special. There is no way to plan them. Every time we plan something together, it's not as good or rich or warm. For a few all-too short minutes it was as if you'd already grown up and we sat and talked without any

words about "How you are doing in school?" We talked about the game and what it must be like to be at the stadium and you knew more about the players than I did and I learned from you.

Well, there's the crossing guard. I wish you didn't have to go to school today. There are so many things I want to say. But, your exit from the car is so quick. I want to savor the moment and you've already spotted a couple of your friends. I just wanted to say, "I love you, kid..."

This illustration, on father's day, shows the difficulty we have in speaking love to our children. What we all want to say to our children, even to each other, is that at one time or another we all feel "possessed" like the man in our gospel lesson. If you are faced with voices from demons you are not alone. There are all sorts of ways that voices call us to do so many things that are unhealthy, even evil. The amazing fact is that God gives us permission to run away from Him, and we go at full sprint sometimes right to the herd of swine, and yet...there will be times when Christ will cross our paths. This text from Luke shows us how Jesus and the disciples went into foreign territory to intercept this man so that he would be set free, liberated. He was healed without even asking for it, without proclaiming Jesus to be messiah, and without being clean. He truly had nothing. No clothes, no home, no friends, and he lived in bondage. He was set free from all of that and you are set free also. One more amazing point about this text is that Jesus did all of this for one person. That is hard for us to understand because we are a majority rules kind of people. But the majority in this account did not get it or were just too scared to see that God is not interested in majority rule.

Here and other places in the bible we find God working in one person to bring healing and that one positively affects others. That is the same thing that God wants from the fathers in this room. If God gives this kind of freedom why do we seem to assume that discipleship is like some chocker collar that keeps us from being happy or having fun? This man becomes the first to proclaim what God has done for him. Even before Jesus' own disciples this man is sent out to tell what God has done for him. And he returns to his home to do it. I wonder if he had any children. I'll bet he did not have any fear of sharing his love and words with his children. Let us be so brave!

AMEN.