



Eleventh Biennial Convention Closing Worship

24 June 2007

National Bishop Raymond Schultz's Sermon

Luke 8:26-31; 35-39

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As [Jesus] stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"-- for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man...Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

...when [the Gerasenes] came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Eleventh Biennial Convention Closing Worship

The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with [Jesus]; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him. (Luke 8:38-39)

I couldn't have asked for a better lesson
on which to preach at the conclusion of this convention.
If ever there was a mission plan of Jesus' making,
this text is it.

The man wants to become a disciple.
He wants to change the kind of person he's been
and go to seminary under Rabbi Jesus.
He is so grateful for his recovery from mental illness
that he is filled with idealism
about bringing the same cure to others.

But Jesus has other plans.
Once you become a rabbi,
people want you to act and speak
in ways that support corporate expectations.

Think about the people
with whom the Gerasene had been hanging around.
Do you think he was invited
to the dinner parties of the wealthy?
Did his relatives ask to have their neighbours
consider him marrying their daughter?
Would husbands have wanted him talking to their wives
while they shopped at the market?

Nope, his friends were others like him.
They probably begged for a living,
stunk to high heaven
and slept in any corner they thought would protect them
from assault during the night.

*...when [the Gerasenes] came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. **And they were afraid.** (Luke 8:35)*

Isn't it amazing that an act of salvation would make people afraid!

But that's how people are.
If Jesus has enough power to accomplish something like that,
he probably has the power to do you great harm as well.
It would be dangerous to trust someone like that.

Eleventh Biennial Convention Closing Worship

Even though Jesus shows
that God uses power to accomplish compassion and salvation,
people are afraid to trust him.

It isn't really fear of Jesus—
it's fear of what lurks inside the human soul.
We have become resigned to the fear
that the powerful will use their ability to hurt people.
Every one of us has inside us
the temptation to use power to dominate others.

The 20th century history of Peru includes a short period
in which the government subdivided the large land monopolies
and redistributed them as homesteads to the landless peasants
who had worked for the owners as virtual slaves.

Were people grateful?

Yes, but in several cases the new little landowners
hired the remaining landless peasants
to work the land for them while they sat around and loafed.

When they were given an opportunity,
former abused people reverted to the same kind of behaviour
as that which once made them so miserable.

So when Jesus comes along and says
that the power that created the universe
is used by God only to do us good,
we aren't sure we believe it.

It doesn't help that insurance contracts
call natural disasters "acts of God!"
Even if we want to believe it,
our experience works against our faith.

Here's how St. Paul put it: (*Romans 7:18-19*)

*For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I
can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I
want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.*

St. Paul didn't make that up.
He simply was stating the obvious.
Being the people that we are, we create societies
in which the more powerful hurt the less powerful.
The founding stories of most cultures
point to some moment in history
in which they brought about the great defeat of someone else.
They derive their identity from a historic display of power.
The United States fought a war of independence against England.

Eleventh Biennial Convention Closing Worship

Some Canadians point to the battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759,
but mostly we take pride in playing brutal hockey.

If that's true about us, what about Jesus?

Should we be afraid?

The scriptures tell us:

Then the devil led [Jesus] up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

Luke 4:5-7

He was as tempted as we all are.

Which way did he go?

*Jesus answered him, 'It is written,
'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' "*

Luke 4:8

There is no need to be afraid of God's Son
or the Father from whom he proceeds.

While the demons are ordered to release the Gerasene man,
even *they* get to plead for mercy.

It is not God of whom we need to be afraid.

There are those who portray God as bloody,
but they do so in order to rationalize their own desires
for self-satisfaction and revenge.

There are always those who require the defeat of someone
so that they can feel victorious.

The man from whom the demons had been removed
was not afraid.

He begged to become a disciple of Jesus.

In his moment of greatest helplessness,
the all-powerful God showed him nothing
but compassion and kindness.

Nor was anything demanded of him.

He was urged simply to go back to his life
and tell people how God was kind to him.

He must have done a good job,
because the capital city of the Gerasenes
eventually became the seat of a bishop
in the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the common era.

He started, not only a congregation,
but a whole diocese!

Eleventh Biennial Convention Closing Worship

An act of human kindness and a grateful recipient
were the ingredients of God's mission of grace.

One human being
who experienced God's merciful loving kindness
overcame the baseless fear of God
that had paralyzed an entire city state.

Jesus lived his life ***In Mission for Others.***
He understood himself to belong to ***a people***
who were ***called*** to such a mission.

When he was criticized
for having table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners,
this is what he said:

*Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I
have come to call not the righteous but sinners."*

Matthew 9:13

His mission was for the ones his people called "the others."

Today we conclude this convention as we began:
as baptized people of God.
Our baptism is our call to mission.
When our children are old enough to confirm their faith,
this is what we ask them:

*Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in
holy baptism:*

*to live among God's faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ
through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?*

We are ***A People Called*** to be ***In Mission for Others.***

This is God's will for us.
God not only saves us by grace for eternity:
God gives us grace day by day
to trust God's call and live it out.

Go therefore in peace. Do not be afraid.
God is with you always,
to the ends of the earth.

Amen.