

They Met Jesus

Luke 8:26-39

Introduction

My message will focus on the gospel lesson today, and as I begin I would like to call your attention to the first sentence of verse 27. In that sentence you will find the phrase that underlies the sermon this morning.

When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town.

Have you ever met anyone famous?

I met former Governor Bob Taft once. I realize that may not be a rare occurrence for some of you here today. But I had never met him before.

He and I were attending the same legislative briefing in Columbus. I just happened to be seated at the same table with friends of his. During the lunch break he came over and they introduced me to him. He asked what I did for living, and where I was from. We chatted for a few minutes about the proposed high speed rail as we walked to the dessert table. He chose the peach cobbler; I picked the chocolate cheesecake. We then returned to our separate tables.

So now I can say, "I met Bob Taft."

And somehow my life isn't any different.

I don't make that statement to in anyway speak ill of Bob Taft. I voted for him at least once during his political career. But I am also fairly certain that my life wouldn't change in any significant way if I were to meet Joe Biden or Joe Burrow or Joey Votto or any other famous guy named Joe.

Over the years as our kids were small, I would take them to the mall whenever Cardboard Heroes had a celebrity athlete there to sign autographs. We would arrive early, stand in line, get the autograph and go home. And after a few hours, the novelty would wear off and life would return to as it had been. Who knows where those autographs are now?

From time to time you will see on TV someone who will shake hands with a celebrity and say, "I'll never wash this hand again." But they do. Eventually. And life returns to normal again.

Don't get me wrong. It is nice to meet new people. And it can be fun to meet a celebrity. My point is: How many people have we met (or will we meet) who genuinely impact our lives in significant ways? Maybe a handful. Maybe less. And maybe not always for the better.

Our text is about what it is like to meet Jesus. And of the many things that could be said about this particular encounter, it is clear that meeting Jesus had a significant impact on this man's life. And I would submit to you, that meeting Jesus ought to also have a significant impact on our lives, too.

Let me identify three specific ways that meeting Jesus should change your life.

1. Meeting Jesus Should Make a Difference in the things WE BELIEVE (Our Profession)

My Grandpa Brodbeck didn't have much to do with the church and matters of faith until just a few years before he died. It was his opinion that Christians didn't really believe the things they claimed to believe – that it was, for all intents and purposes, just something people did "just in case" the Bible turned out to be true.

As a way of making his point, he would often say that if we Christians really believed that Jesus was coming back soon, we would eat our dessert first. How terrible it would be for the rapture to happen, and the last thing we would see as we lifted off was that piece of chocolate cake sitting there on the plate.

I think about Grandpa's logic a lot as hear myself making belief statements about various. As a congregation, we will say the Apostles' Creed in a few minutes – a summary of belief statements. But do we really believe them?

I am always amazed by texts like this one. The demons in this story – and in other places in Scripture – know who Jesus is, and understand that they can't win in a battle with Him.

- They openly identify Him as the Son of the Most High God
- They knew that He would someday cast them into the abyss – into a place of permanent torture
- They also knew they currently outnumbered Him 6,000 to 1 (maybe 6,000 to 13 – if you count the disciples)

Those demons obviously didn't believe...

- The townspeople could control them
- Or that the chains the townspeople used to bind this man they inhabited could curtail them
- Or believe that the herd of pigs could constrict their ability to cause destruction if they wanted to do it.

But they did believe there was something different about Jesus.

And so should it be with us. Meeting Jesus ...

- Should impact the very essence of our belief system.
- Should create a beginning point for everything we believe
 - Everything we believe begins with Christ and flows forward from there
 - Not from any philosophical or political line of reasoning, but from Jesus

2. Meeting Jesus Should Make a Difference in the things WE SEE (Our Priorities)

I'm reading now beginning at verse 34:

When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out **to see** what had happened. (Luke 8:34-35)

The Apostle Paul is a great example of someone who met Jesus, and as a result had his whole way of looking at things changed. His priorities underwent a dramatic change on the road to Damascus. He went from being a persecutor of the faith to being its strongest advocate.

In our Epistle reading (Galatians 3:23-39) today, Paul is outlining the transition that needed happened from a life lived under the law to a life lived under Christ. You remember the wording ... Now that we have "clothed ourselves with Christ ... we are no longer held prisoner by the law."

It used to be, Paul says, that we saw the Law as our salvation. By following, we would receive eternal life. But Jesus changed all that. Now, Paul says, we need to see the Law as something that holds us prisoner. And that transformation in what Paul saw happened because he met Jesus there on the road to Damascus.

How sad is it then, that in the gospel message, we see the exact opposite to be true?

Here before their very eyes was a man formerly inhabited by 6000 demon, now clothed and in his right mind. But that is not what they saw.

If they had really seen what they should have seen they would have:

- Rejoiced over a man who was no longer demon possessed
- Raced back into town to get other sick people

- Responded with their own statement of belief in Christ

But instead, they were afraid and asked Jesus to leave.

In the Gospel of Mark, the description is even more emphatic. “They pleaded with Jesus to leave” (Mark 5:17).

One of the descriptors of the early church was how their priorities changed. Again, reading from the Message paraphrase:

And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved. (Acts 2:44-47)

But as wonderful as a change in priorities is, there is still more.

3. Meeting Jesus Should Make a Difference in the things WE DO (Our Practice)

My Mom didn't have the opportunity to go to college. My Grandpa didn't think girls needed an education. And she always regretted it. If she had gone I'm sure she would have been an English teacher. She was always quoting poetry.

And whenever she didn't think the things people were doing with their lives matched up well with the things they said they believed she would recite this poem by Charles William Daugherty.

IF JESUS CAME TO YOUR HOUSE

If Jesus came to your house to spend a day or two
If he came unexpectedly, I wonder what you'd do.
I know you'd give your nicest room, to such an honored Guest,
And all the food you'd serve Him, would be the very best.
And you would keep assuring Him, you're glad to have Him
there
That serving Him in your home is joy beyond compare.

But-when you saw Him coming, would you meet Him at the
door
With arms outstretched in welcome to your heavenly Visitor?
Or would you have to change your clothes before you let Him
in,
Or hide some magazines and put the Bibles where they'd
been?
Would you turn off the television and hope he hadn't heard
And wish you hadn't uttered that last, loud, hasty word?

Would you hide your worldly music and put some hymn books
out?
Could you let Jesus walk right in, or would you rush about?
And I wonder-if the Savior spent a day or two with you,
Would you go right on doing the things you always do?
Would you keep right on saying the things you always say?
Would life for you continue as it does from day to day?

Would your family conversation keep up its usual pace?
And would you find it hard each meal to say a table grace?
Would you sing the songs you always sing and read the books
you read?
And let Him know the things on which your mind and spirit
feed?
Would you take Jesus with you, everywhere you'd planned to
go,
Or would you, maybe, change your plans for just a day or so?

Would you be glad to have Him, meet your very closest friends,

*Or would you hope they'd stay away, until His visit ends?
Would you be glad to have Him stay forever on and on,
Or would you sigh, with great relief when He at last was gone?*

*It might be interesting to know, the things that you would do,
If Jesus came in person to spend some time with you.*

There should be no difference in how we live our lives if Jesus were to physically appear at our front door. There ought to be such a consistency in our lives that no changes would be necessary if Jesus Himself were to knock on the front door.

We know meeting Jesus had that kind of impact on this formerly demon-possessed man. He wanted to follow Jesus – to leave this place where his friends and relatives had chained him, abandoned him, perhaps abused him and follow Jesus wherever He went.

But Jesus said, “No.” Look at verse 39: “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.”

And in obedience, the man went. That's the mark. When what you want differs from what God says, which do you choose?

Application

Meeting Jesus should have a significant impact on our lives. It ought to make a difference in ...

- What we believe (our profession)
- What we care about (our priorities)
- What we do with our lives (our practice)

And that is all well and good if we were ever to meet Jesus.

Oh wait! We have met Him. He is here right now. Remember what Matthew 18 says? *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)*

Or even Matthew 28?

*“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:20)*

Our faith assures us that in every moment, in every place, we are in the presence of the One who impacts lives. We meet Him all the time.

So, my dear friends, what difference does it make for you? Amen.