

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, June 3, 2012**

**YOUR MISSION STARTS HERE**

**Luke 8:26-39**

My son Nate (whom I love) left this past Friday to begin his summer “adventure in missions.” He flew to Atlanta on Friday for four days of orientation and team-building with the other members of his mission team, and then on Tuesday they will all fly from Atlanta to Frankfurt (Germany) to Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and then to Nairobi (Kenya). From Nairobi they will have a 268-mile drive to the town of Busia, on the Kenya-Uganda border, which will be their home base for the next seven or eight weeks.

A few days before he left, we went to REI to get a couple items he still needed, and while we were there, I asked Nate what he would preach about if he were giving the sermon at Faith this Sunday. I really wasn’t sure what his answer would be. He thought for a moment, and then said he would talk about how our mission field is where we are, and we are to be witnesses for Jesus right where we live, and especially among our friends or family. “Sounds good,” I said. “What verses or passage from the Bible would you base it on?”

He brought up the story in the Gospels about the guy who had been possessed by a whole army of demons until Jesus cast out the demons, after which the man asked Jesus to let him go with Him (Jesus) and join His band of disciples, but Jesus told him instead to go back home and tell his family and friends about what the Lord had done for him. Nate thought it would be a good story to remind us that you don’t have to go to Kenya or France or Mexico or some other far off place to tell people about Jesus and His saving love. If God calls you to Kenya or France or Mexico or somewhere else to be His witness and to serve Him there, then that is the place for you. But if here is where God has placed you, if here is where the Lord wants you to be, for as long as you are here, your mission field is here, and here – among your family and friends, your neighbors, your colleagues at work, your classmates and fellow-students, and those in your sphere of influence through sports or music or other voluntary associations – is where Jesus wants you to be His witness. Here is where Jesus wants each of us to tell others what God has done for us, and how we have received grace and mercy from Him. In a nutshell, that is the message my son thought the Lord would want him to share with us if he were giving the sermon here today.

Of course, the story to which Nate referred is the one we just read from the Gospel of Luke. A shorter, more condensed version of the story is found in the Gospel of Matthew, while Mark has a longer, more detailed account (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20). In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson gives Luke’s version the title “The Madman and the Pigs.” I like the title, except that it fails to mention the other characters in the story, including the most important one of all – Jesus. Still, a title like “The Madman and the Pigs” does get your attention, doesn’t it?

This dramatic incident takes place on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, in predominantly Gentile territory. Keep in mind that the Sea of Galilee is really a lake. Jesus and the disciples

have just crossed the lake, and the moment Jesus steps ashore He is greeted by this “madman” who is possessed by an army of demons. When Jesus asks his name, the man says it is “Legion,” because many demons have taken over his life. A legion was the largest division in the Roman army, consisting of as many as 6,000 foot soldiers and 120 horsemen.

Regardless of the exact number, a horde of demons had overrun this man’s life, causing him to be cut off from family and friends. Banished from the community as a whole, he now lived in the cemetery and wore no clothes. Anyone who saw him would say he was more like a monster than a man. His life was a total mess. In some of the detail we don’t find in Matthew or Luke, Mark says “he had often been chained hand and foot, but he (would tear) the chains apart and (break) the irons on his feet.” He was so strong that no one could subdue him. The word translated “subdue” (*damazo*) literally means “to tame.” He was like a vicious wild animal that no one was able to tame. He was a danger to others and a danger to himself. His existence was a living hell. That is, until Jesus arrived on the scene.

You know what happened. I won’t go into it in detail, but I do want you to notice, as one Bible scholar (Darrell Bock) points out, that while Jesus was outnumbered by the demons, He was not overmatched. However astronomical the odds against Him may appear to be, I’ll take Jesus every time. How about you?

This legion of demons was no match for Jesus, and they knew it. They pleaded with Jesus not to send them to the bottomless pit, but to allow them instead to go into a herd of pigs feeding on the hill nearby. Jesus said OK, and as soon as they entered the pigs, the whole herd went into a crazed panic and stampeded over a cliff into the lake, where they all drowned. Mark again provides the detail that the herd numbered about two thousand pigs in all. All were lost, resulting in a huge financial loss for the owners of the herd.

Word of what had happened spread rapidly, and the townspeople rushed out to see for themselves. When they got there, they saw this formerly demon-possessed, out-of-control, vicious, untamed animal of a man now healed, dressed, in his right mind, and sitting calmly at the feet of Jesus.

Think of the most astonishing “before and after” pictures you’ve ever seen of contestants on *The Biggest Loser*, or the results of some workout regimen like P90X, some truly extreme makeover, or – how about this – hair transplant surgery, with a money back guarantee if you’re not satisfied. The transformation that took place in this man’s life tops them all! No self-help program, no eating plan, no amount of exercise, no medical procedure or magic pill, or any combination of them could produce the change that Jesus brought about in his life. Only the power of Jesus, which, of course, is the power of God, could make him a new person. Nobody else could do what Jesus did for this man. There is no denying that this man is a living, breathing miracle.

The townspeople see the miracle. They recognize the miraculous change that has taken place. But they decide the cost is just too high. Sadly, it seems that money matters more to them than mercy, pigs more than people. So they ask Jesus to leave. And Jesus leaves.

The man healed by Jesus wants to go with Him. He wants to join the band of Jesus' disciples. He wants to follow Jesus wherever He goes. But Jesus says no. Instead, Jesus tells him that his mission field is back home. He is to go back home to his family and friends, and tell them how much God has done for him. He is to be a witness to the difference Jesus has made in his life. So, what did he do? He did what Jesus told him to do. He went back home and told people all over town what Jesus had done for him.

A witness, you know, is a person who tells what he or she has seen or heard or experienced. And, just like this formerly demon-possessed man, the Lord Jesus wants you and me to be His witnesses – to tell others what He has done in our lives, and how He has had mercy on us.

Not everyone is called to go to a mission field far from home to tell others about Jesus and His love. Some are called, yes – and if the Lord speaks to your heart and calls you to go somewhere, anywhere, in His name, be sure to answer the call. Some of us are called to go, but many of us are called to stay, and to serve the Lord Jesus as His witnesses right where we are – among our own family and friends, in our own neighborhoods and schools and workplaces. Our mission field – *your* mission field – is right here. Your mission field may be a hospital or a government office or a military unit or a school or a retirement community or the place where you volunteer or on the street where you live. This is the message the Lord impressed on the heart of my son.

I'm not suggesting that you should violate the rules of your workplace or try to stuff your religion down the throat of someone you're convinced really needs it! No way. What I'm suggesting is that all of us, regardless of our age or vocation, need to understand and not forget that where we are is the mission field, and we are all missionaries. We are all called to be witnesses to the power of God's love and His grace that is truly amazing. We are all called to tell others who Jesus is and what He has done for us. And to do it in a winsome way. Not by beating people over the head with the Bible.

What? You don't have a story as dramatic as this man who had been held hostage by a legion of demons? I don't either. Not very many people do. But if you have come to know and believe in Jesus as the Savior of sinners sent from heaven and the true Lord of all, what He has done in your life is no less miraculous. For, as Paul writes in Ephesians 2, you and I were dead in our transgressions and sins (2:1). Dead. Spiritually lifeless. As helpless to save ourselves as the demon-possessed man was. Until God stepped in. The Scripture says: "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love for us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved" (2:4-5).

You and I, just like the demon-possessed man Jesus rescued, redeemed, and restored, are living, breathing, walking miracles – witnesses to the power and love of Jesus. You don't need to have a dramatic story. Not everybody does. Not everybody has a "Damascus Road experience" like the apostle Paul. Your "everyday story" of God's grace may be just what someone needs to hear.

Os Guinness, one of the most influential Christian thinkers in the world today, has said that the main problem with American Christians is not that we aren't where we should be but that

we are not what we should be right where we are as doctors, housewives, lawyers, (IT experts), or nurses. To which we could add teachers, government contractors, military officers, accountants, and pastors.

Right where you are is where God has placed you. Right where you are is your mission field. Right where you are is where God wants you to be a witness – to demonstrate the difference Jesus has made in your life, and, whenever you have the opportunity, to tell others what the Lord has done for you. Don't worry about the results. The results are God's responsibility, not yours.

To paraphrase the apostle Paul in Romans 10, how will our neighbors and friends, our co-workers and family members come to know and believe in Jesus unless someone shares the good news with them? Unless *we* tell them about Jesus and what He has done for us?

We *are* Christ's ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20). We *are* His witnesses. May we be faithful witnesses, pointing always to Jesus.

Our mission starts here. *Your* mission starts here. May we fulfill our mission here and wherever God places us, to the glory of His name. Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.