



SERMON - 1st. After Trinity - At His Feet... The place to be!

Our N.T. story this evening continues where this morning's Gospel story left off. So where did we leave things?

The liberation of the Demoniac known as 'Legion' (This is not his name! Evil had taken even the man's unique identity - his name - from him!) is a powerful tale with so much to tell us about Jesus and who he is. It is an odd miracle story in that at no point is it obvious that it is the man's 'faith' that makes him whole. Indeed, at the beginning of the story the man himself is submerged under such a weight of evil that he, as himself, is invisible. But at the end of the story this man who was unclean on so many levels (Demon possessed, living amongst the graves and the dead bodies, dirty and un-washed, and naked) is seen clothed and in his right mind - made both whole and clean, and the demise of the swine by being 'washed' off the face of the earth may even be seen as making clean this area of the country deemed by many Jews as unclean by nature and by practice. All those things that formed barriers to the opening up of this land to the Gospel has been removed, and a witness left to speak of God's wonderful works is left behind.

In fact there are two witnesses left behind, one standing for God's wonderful works and one against the uncleanness of the society there. Biblical justice requires two witnesses, and here, if you like, is a character witness to the power of God to change lives and liberate the prisoners, and also a witness to the need for that change and liberation. Some traditional interpretation of this story has it that those herds of Pigs, which to Jews are unclean animals, were at least in part owned by Jews who used Gentile herders to keep the animals and so create profit. Some of the land on the Eastern side of the sea was historically part of the tribal area of old Israel of the twelve tribes, and now known as the Decapolis of 10 Greek towns, but it was now polluted and unclean.

In this evenings reading from the Gospel according to Mark we are taken back to the 'Right side' of the sea - back into clean a country and an acceptable community. A pillar of the local community becomes the centre of Jesus' attention - a leader of the Synagogue no-less! Here, surely, is where we will find faith in action! It might be expected from a man so highly esteemed in his society, that he sends a delegation to Jesus to petition for help, but he comes in person to the same place occupied in the previous story by the Demoniac - to the feet of Jesus. It is a place that all must come to to receive from Him, and place that all will occupy one day whether sought out by them or not - for 'At His feet every knee shall bow...'

But this man comes in humility and as much faith as he can muster, to those precious feet, and pleads for help - 'Hosannah to the Son of David' the crowds would soon be crying - 'help us from the highest place' - and before long their cries will be drowned out by the cry of the World - 'Crucify him!' and those feet will be pierced by cruel nails!

And Jesus responds with compassion for this Father who is facing the loss of his Daughter and together they begin the journey along the road. We are not told how far it is to the house. We can imagine the crowds milling around the little group as they press through them to their destination - but we can only imagine the state of frustration of the father as the resulting slow progress, so pressed in are they from every side by a mass of humanity.

And then... Jesus stops in his tracks! He looks around him and asks, 'Who touched me?' - literally - 'Who has just reached out to me to touch my garments?'

The father must have been distraught! The Disciples are just confused. 'What do you mean "Who touched me?" Most of the local population are trying to touch you! We are all being barged hither and thither by them. How can you say "Who touched me?"

And immediately we are thrust back into the world of the untouchables that I am sure the Disciples thought they had left behind over the 'Other Side' of the lake. Here they were at home amongst their own. Here contamination by uncleanness was at least unlikely as most Jews would seek to ensure they did not cause such an offence if they were themselves accidentally unclean. Yet suddenly the tightest packed centre of the crowd around the Rabbi falls back away from - well, from uncleanness. A little woman, possibly known to many of them already, has usurped the Synagogue Leader's position at Jesus' feet and she is unclean and un-wanted in that society. Maybe even the Synagogue Leader himself steps back in horror? If rendered unclean he will be unable to attend to his duties!

Yet Jesus gazes down at her and He calls her 'Daughter'! Isn't this story all about another daughter? A little maid whose life is ebbing away even as they pause along the way. The hustle and bustle of the crowd dies away into silence, and for a few moments there is only this little cameo of two people - the Rabbi, and at his feet, the outcast - a mirror image of the previous story where the Demoniac is flung down at the same feet. Can it be that this woman and the Demoniac both have as much right as the Leader fo the Synagogue to be at this place? What has happened?

Both stories are much the same really in content and outcome, even though the details are very different. In both cases there is a need - a desperate need for cleansing - and although in the first story Jesus goes to seek out the need, and in the second it seems that the need comes to Him, yet there is a great compassion from the Master at the root of the action. Here it is shown when he calls this woman 'Daughter' She came to receive from Him, but instead is received by Him! - as a Daughter! No longer an outcast, and in spite of her great fear, (has she taken something to which she has no right?), she tells Him the whole story... (and it may well have taken a while to do this! - imagine the distraught father's state of mind during this process!)

And she, this nameless woman, leaves with her faith confirmed, clean and once more accepted as a Daughter of Israel - another non-person restored into the image of her Creator. She reached out just to touch Jesus and received her wholeness as Jesus was touched by her infirmity, - but what now of this other - the Leader of the Synagogue - who also has reached out to Him for help? It seems it is too late! Maybe it always was going to be too late - delay or no delay - fever in those hot climates can race to its inevitable conclusion with indecent haste!

Just as they turn back to the road a delegation meets them and addresses the father 'Too late - don't bother now, no-one can do anything - you did what you could but maybe some things are just meant to be - let the Rabbi get on with other things now - she is beyond even this hopeless hope!'

But just when you think that that little woman has left the story, she is back at its very centre! Indeed, she always was! Jesus turns to Jairus and interrupts the conversation in a way that only Jesus can do as he says to Jairus, 'Ignore what those others are saying but remember what I just said to that woman about her faith making her whole! Don't be afraid: just believe!'

Believe what? That this Rabbi, as wonderful and as powerful as he was, could do anything about death? What Jairus had not gotten hold of, yet!, was just whose feet it was that he had come to! Yet no-one comes to those feet and goes away unchanged! Some there were and are who rise and go away saddened by what they find about themselves there, but others, like the Grateful Leper, the healed Demoniac, the little woman, and even Jairus, go away re-born! Some, rejected by those nearest to them, even come to prepare those feet for burial and to worship, and go away forgiven and accepted. None leave as they come!

So Jairus follows Jesus back to his home, where the funeral ritual has already begun. Still, I am sure, full of fear, but also in obedience, like another

distraught father of the epileptic boy, asking for his unbelief to be moved on... he draws his wife to him as they enter the child's room where the touch of the Rabbi and his simple words, 'Little maid, get up' are all the reward they need.

At the feet of Jesus the same spoken or unspoken prayer of faith is rewarded. Some fall down at those feet at the end of their human endeavour, some, like the Demoniac, are thrust there by forces that seem outside of themselves, and some kneel in silence, unable to voice their needs, whilst others come and it all spills out from them - the whole story... All come there when all else seems hopeless, and none leave unchanged. - And still there is no other place that we must come. Here is 'Love, vast as the ocean' - at the feet of the Lord of things. What we find there depends on how we come there - but it is there we will bow and confess him as Lord! Let us first come there in humility and faith,
AMEN

G Am D G
By Your side, I would stay

G Am D G
In Your arms I would lay

G C G Am G D
Jesus, lover of my soul

G C G Am G D
Nothing from you I withhold

C G
Lord I love you, and adore you

Am D G
What more can I say!

C G
You cause my love, to grow stronger
Am D G Am G
with every passing day.