

PENTECOST: IN FAITH WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7)

June 24, 2007

Isaiah 65:1-9

Psalm 22:19-28

Galatians 3:23-29

Luke 8:26-39

Take It Outside!

As a physician, Luke was no doubt fascinated with the miraculous healings that Jesus did. Thus, Luke's telling of the healing of the demoniac from Gerasa is a powerful one. The man's mental illness was one that had persisted and worsened over time (Luke 8:27b). He was forced by his condition to abandon home and community and live on the fringes—in a graveyard. He was a threat to others and even to himself.

When Jesus encounters the man and rebukes the demons, they recognize his authority and beg to be cast into a nearby herd of pigs. The pigs rush headlong down the slopes and immediately drown in a lake. The man receives his healing, but the people around are frightened out of their wits and they beg Jesus to leave. The man who was healed pleads to go with Jesus, but Jesus instructs him, "Go back home and tell everyone how much God has done for you" (Luke 8:39a, *CEV*).

At the end of many healings, Jesus often tells the person he healed not to tell anyone. Here, he wants the man to broadcast the news. Jesus prayed openly, preached openly, and healed openly. His was certainly not a closet gospel. Here, he most clearly told the man to spread the news of God's goodness to him to those he met. Don't just bask in the light of God's grace and mercy, but "Go tell." This was a command that Jesus would later give his disciples when he was leaving them. Take the Gospel outside!

Take it outside. That's where the world is... waiting to hear the Gospel of Christ through us. Like the petty street fighter, let's take it outside; unlike the petty street fighter, however, we do battle with the real enemy, the devil, as we resist his "flaming arrows" (Ephesians 6:16) and "fight a good fight for the faith and claim eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12, *CEV*).

Take it outside. It is often when we leave the hallowed places and get back into the world that the demons we got rid of try to attack us once again. It is at those moments that we need God the most and need to have our complete armor on (Ephesians 6:11). It is when we take it outside that we can truly test our ability to witness, to be faithful, and to withstand.

The story in Luke's Gospel juxtaposes the upheaval that the demonic presence causes and the calmness that full restoration brings. Restoration brings us back into community. Our faith in Christ gives us the authority to shed the garments of the Law and to "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27, *CEV*) in the same way we put on new clothes. After his encounter with Jesus, the former demoniac was clothed physically, mentally, and spiritually. He, too, had put on the mind of Christ and was now restored to God's family (Galatians 3:29).

Yet, not everyone welcomes the power of the Holy Spirit. In the midst of the released power of the Almighty, ordinary people tremble and become afraid. Jesus' power "frightened" the townspeople and they begged him to leave. Similarly, in the story which precedes the healing of the demoniac, the disciples were both "frightened and amazed" (Luke 8:25b) **after** Jesus had calmed a fierce storm which threatened to sink their boat.

But we need not fear when we come face to face with Jesus' miraculous power. We need only recall his faithfulness and resolve in our hearts that we will obediently "take his message outside."

This week's Reflection was prepared by Dorette Saunders who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Senior Research Editor in the Education Unit of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Uzbekistan – With thanks to God for opportunities to distribute Scriptures, for progress in translating the Old Testament into Uzbek and Karakalpak, and that the government has eased restrictions on Scripture imports, and with prayers for the opening of a bookshop in Tashkent and for the establishment of an office in Turkmenistan; **Tajikstan** – With thanks to God for peace in the country, and with prayers for the ongoing translation of the New Testament into modern Tajik and for the ability to implement projects planned for this year.

Activity Corner: "Take It Outside" Get-Together (an activity for children)

Supplies needed: Bible (contemporary translation) or Bible storybook; pen; crayons or markers; sheets of 8-1/2" x 11" construction paper; stickers (optional); Bible games.

On the construction paper (use it vertically), write an invitation to your neighborhood friends or school friends. Decorate it with the crayons or markers or stickers. Fold paper horizontally. Address it and hand deliver it. Have an adult help you prepare lemonade and snacks (potato chips or cookies) on the day of the party. Invite your friends play *Bible games and read Luke 18:15-17 in the back yard, porch, or wherever you're comfortable. End by singing a few of your favorite church school songs.

*If you don't have any Bible board games, create your own games, like "Bible Hopscotch." If you are permitted to draw a hopscotch game with chalk, make the diagram with the numbers 1 – 9. In addition to the number, write one of the nine fruits of the spirit as described in Galatians 5:22-23 in each of the boxes: love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. When landing on a box, each player needs to say the word and spell it out loud.