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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington  
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Sermon on Luke 8:26-39

Worship Theme:

**THE MISSION RIGHT BEFORE US**

We tend to think of mission work as being “over there,” something done in a far-away place. But mission work isn't just “over there”; it's also right before us. If we have seen the grace of God, we will serve as witnesses for Christ. And we don't need to cross the ocean to share the gospel. We can simply cross the street. God will provide opportunities to serve as the witnesses Jesus has made us to be. Let us continue to pray for and support “over there” mission work. But let us also give our undivided attention to the mission that God had placed right before each of us.

Sermon Theme: “The One Right Here”

1. What a Terrible Waste!
2. What Tremendous Value

What if Jesus hadn't stopped? Luke chapter 8 has one of those accounts that people tend to remember because it has some wild things in it. Jesus and his disciples have sailed across the Sea of Galilee, and when they land there's a man who meets them. But it's not the most normal interaction they've ever had. The man is naked, lives in tombs, and is possessed by so many demons that he literally introduces himself as “Legion”, a term which the Roman Empire used to refer to a company of anywhere from 3,000 to 6,000 foot-soldiers. This man was loaded to the max with servants of Satan. That's one thing that makes this account so memorable. The other is that Jesus sends this entire company of demons out of the man and into a nearby herd of pigs which then goes berserk, runs down the hill, jumps into the sea, and drowns. We tend to remember that too. But today we want to focus on more than just the “what;” we also want to see the “why.”

So why did Jesus do all that? It would be easy to see this as a tremendous waste of resources! First, think of the time Jesus spent here. He had a total of only three years to spend on earth in full-time ministry, so logically Jesus should want to spend that time with as many people as he could! But here he takes his entire group of disciples, sails all the way across the lake, and when he lands, he doesn't immediately go off and find a crowd. He deliberately lands in a place where his first interaction will be with a naked demoniac who lives in a graveyard. Why waste so much time on just one person?!

But the waste doesn't stop there either. There was a herd of pigs nearby. If they had known what this day would be like for them, those pigs probably would have stayed in bed! But Jesus stops for a conversation with this Legion of demons, and instead of banishing them all back to hell, he allows them to take this entire herd of pigs and drown them dead. If you've ever spent any time raising animals, you know the tremendous amount of resources it takes – time, food, land, money. **What a terrible waste this was – and all for just one guy!**

So which person do you consider to be a waste of your time and resources? As members of God's Holy Church on earth, we have the distinct privilege and blessing of being God's mouthpieces in the world. Every single one of us is tasked with proclaiming the gospel of Jesus and sharing the good news that God became a human being to do everything required to save human beings from sin and to open heaven to people forever. This is the most important and greatest message anyone will ever hear – eternally life-changing!

But have you decided someone isn't worth telling? Perhaps a neighbor, a co-worker, a relative? Maybe they aren't worth telling because you've told them already and they just won't listen. Or maybe they aren't worth telling because "you know them" and they'll never listen to any of that "God stuff." Or maybe you just don't like them and, while you might not say it out loud, you don't really want them to be in heaven someday because if they are, then heaven will be a little worse off for it. Or maybe you've convinced yourself that even though telling people about Jesus is important and you agree it absolutely should be done, it's not something YOU will do – you're too old, too young, don't know what to say, don't have the time or energy, you've been there done that and know how it always ends.

I can't help but wonder if that's how Jesus' disciples felt when they landed and saw this man coming toward them. "Oh great – a naked lunatic. Just what we needed! Today was going to be a great day with Jesus, but now we have to deal with THIS. Probably should have landed a couple miles farther up the beach."

But Jesus' disciples were about to get one of the most important lessons God's people can get: the **tremendous value of The One Right Here**. Instead of asking "what if Jesus hadn't stopped", let's ask the question just a little differently – "Why was it absolutely necessary that Jesus DID stop?" The short and sweet answer is: the man needed him. Jesus had to stop because someone needed what Jesus had to offer. Jesus came into the world to defeat and overcome the power of sin, Satan, and death. This man was constantly surrounded by all three: he was a sinner, because every human being is a sinner; he was filled with thousands of demons, active servants of Satan the devil himself; and he lived in tombs with rotting dead bodies. If ever there were a man who understood the helplessness and hopelessness of the human existence apart from God, it was this man!

So Jesus stopped. Jesus took the time and effort to minister to the needs of **the one right here** in front of him. The man had spiritual needs which Jesus knew how to provide. So Jesus banished the demons from this man's body, and when the people of the town came out to see him, they found the man in perfectly normal condition again, something they likely hadn't seen from him in a very long time. Yet the greatest miracle that day wasn't that the man got dressed in clothes and could go back to living in normal society again. No, the greatest miracle was that another person was saved by Jesus.

If you were to insert yourself into this Bible account, where would you be? Many of us might say we see ourselves most easily as the disciples, the followers of Jesus who are watching the amazing things he does. That wouldn't be a bad place to see ourselves. After all, being a follower of Jesus is the greatest blessing

this life can have – to see him and hear him and know him – we are eternally blessed if we are his disciples and what a distinct honor and privilege it is to see the power of God at work in this world.

But I submit to you that there might be another place we fit even better: the sinner whom Jesus stops to save. Some of us have been Christian followers of Jesus for almost 100 years. Some of us have just begun hearing about Jesus very recently. Most of us find ourselves somewhere between those two places. But every single one of us – not a single person in this room excluded! – every single one of us is a sinner whom Jesus stopped to save. We are human beings who live in this world and therefore we are infected by sin and affected by its consequences. We have never lived a day in our life that has not involved sin, both our own and the sins of others around us. And we are human beings who are bombarded by the power of Satan the devil. Though we are not filled with thousands of his evil servants, we are still under attack from them and their temptations every day as they try to eat away and destroy any faith and confidence we have in God. And we are human beings for whom the reality of death looms like a cloud over everything we do. Every day we go about our tasks knowing, at least in the back of our minds, that this could be the last thing we ever do. Whether it's later this afternoon or 90 years from now, death is going to come for us sooner or later.

All of which means we are just like the naked demon-possessed man. We have no power or ability to free ourselves from this devastating reality. We have desperate needs that can only be met in one way. So Jesus stops. He willingly directs himself to wherever we are, looks right at us, and joyfully serves **the one right here** in front of him: you, me, and so many countless others! He is so filled with grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love that he can think of no better use of his time and effort than to come to each and every one of us and save us.

And because of Jesus, our lives are changed forever – no longer dictated by sin, Satan, or the fear of looming death. Instead, we are now dressed in the robes of Christ's righteousness, sitting at Jesus' feet, and listening to everything he has to say. And as we listen, we hear him saying the same thing to us that he did to the no-longer-demon-possessed man. After being freed from his former life, that man begged Jesus to let him follow Jesus wherever he went. But Jesus had something else for the man to do. *"Return home and tell how much God has done for you."*

Did you also notice what Jesus does at the end of this account? He leaves. Jesus and his disciples sailed all the way across the Sea of Galilee, land at a very specific location, Jesus spends all his time and focus saving ONE person, and then gets back into the boat and sails away. And it may seem like **a tremendous waste!** But not for that one person. For that one person, Jesus just made all the difference in the world. And it's not that Jesus didn't care about the rest of the people in that village and region – he absolutely did! But now there was someone else perfectly equipped to tell those people all about the love God had for them. *"Return home and tell how much God has done for you."*

That's our mission and privilege now too as those whom Jesus has freed and saved. There is a huge need for people to serve in full-time Gospel ministry as

pastors and teachers and missionaries across the world, and we'll have the opportunity to talk about that more in a couple weeks. Today is not about pastors and teachers and missionaries. It's about Christians. All Christians are included here – no matter what excuses we may try to use for why it shouldn't include us. This is an integral part of who we are now – Jesus has saved us and as a result, we are part of HIS mission to go out and proclaim his Word so that many others may be saved too! There is no greater opportunity in life than to be the mouthpiece of the Savior to **The One Right Here** in front of us. God already used someone else to bless us this way, and now whoever happens to be in front of us needs Jesus just as much as we do. Why continue to do all this? Because of how greatly our Savior God loves people. It's the best news ever. So tell them! Amen.

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.