WHAT IS OUR MESSAGE?

In this award winning film called "The Mission," Robert DeNiro plays a mercenary named Mendoza who has taken asylum in the local church after killing his brother in a fit of jealous rage. He eventually leaves the church and heads to a mission post located above the waterfalls in a South American jungle. Because of what he has done, and how bad he feels, he ties himself to a several-hundred pound net of items that represents his sinful life. He feels compelled to drag this sack of sin around with him as a way to do penance for what he has done. As you watched this clip you'll see him slip under the burden of his past, with the rope choking the very life out of him. He feels terrible and yet doesn't know what to do with his sin and the shame that comes with it.

Have you ever felt like that? I suspect that some here today still feel tied to some transgressions. You go through life dragging around that hurt and pain. Others of you carrying the guilt of things that happened long ago. God wants to free us this morning. He wants to help us throw off the things that hinder and the sin that so easily entangles. He wants to make us whole.

Today we are concluding our series Made for Mission. We have looked at the questions 'Why do we go? Where do we go and Who will go?' Today I want to ask another basic question; 'What is our message?' As we go, what is it that we want to share with others?

We can only share with others that which we have first received. I remember when Naomi and I first went to the Doulos, the ship was still in dry-dock. We had some visitors to the ship one day and they asked me to show them around. We wandered through the ship and I told them what I knew, which was not much. Compare that with having lived for 2 years on the ship, when you knew where everything was and you had experience of living onboard.

Likewise, in our faith we can only share what we ourselves have first experienced. Today I want to look at he story of a man in the bible who truly understood what it meant to be transformed by Jesus.

Mark 5:1-2 They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him.

What is our message? Three things;

1. Jesus Wants to KNOW You

When Jesus and His disciples arrived at the far side of the lake they encountered a demon possessed man that came towards them. The following verses describe what happened;

Mark 5:5-9 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. 6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7 He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" 8 For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" 9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."

The first thing the man shouts is "What do you want with me?" In other words, "Jesus, why are you here? What are you going to do?" Jesus says to the man, "What is your name?" What did Jesus want? He wanted to know him. Jesus wanted to get involved in his life. He wanted to help him, and that meant finding out what was going on.

This is the heart of message that we seek to bring to all the peoples of the earth. God loves you.

The love of God is one of the great realities of the universe, a pillar upon which the hope of the world rests. But it is a personal, intimate thing too. God does not love populations, He loves people. He loves not masses, but men -- A. W. Tozer

There was a great theologian who came to the USA from England and was being interviewed by a group of seminary students. The question was asked, "What is the most profound thought that ever occupied your mind." The answer was, "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." You may go very, very deep in theology; you may become a scholar; you may become a philosopher, but you'll never ever understand anything more profound than to understand that God loves you so much He gave His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Love creates value in what is loved. There is a love that turns rag dolls into priceless treasures. There is a love that fastens itself onto ragged little creatures, for reasons that no one could ever quite figure out, and makes them precious and valued beyond calculation. This is a love beyond reason. This is the love of God. This is the love with which God loves you and me. – John Orteber

I heard the testimony of a pastor in Michigan. He grew up in a non Christian home. His father was raised a Muslim and his mother was an atheist. When he graduated from the fourth grade his homeroom teacher named Mr. Snell gave him a New Testament which he had personally signed. In his Mr. Snell had written: "Dear Darron, I hope this book will lead you to an understanding of how much God loves you. Read it as often as you can." Those simple words impacted his life. That he would understand 'how much God loves you.' Two years later he invited Christ into his life.

This is certainly my testimony as well. I had heard about the love of God growing up, but it was not really until a camp councillor shared his own story of coming to Jesus with me when I was 13 that I first remember truly understanding the fact that God loves me.

2. Jesus Wants to FREE You

Mark 5:3-4 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. 4 For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him.

Everybody in this man's life had tried to bind him. They had done this because they were trying to help him. Instead of trying to bind him like everyone else, Jesus set him free.

Mark 5:12-13 The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." 13 He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

It must have been a sight to have seen 2000 pigs go screaming down a hill into a lake and drowned. Even more incredible was the transformation that had taken place in the life of the demonized man.

Mark 5:14-15 Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. 15 When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

Notice the difference before and after. Before the man had to be bound. No one was strong enough to restrain him. Now he is sitting there - no need for restraints. Before the man was naked. In the parallel passage in Luke it tells us this.

Luke 8:27 When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.

Now the man is dressed. His nakedness is covered. Before the man would cry out and cut himself with stones. Now the man is in his right mind. It says in Luke;

Luke 8:36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been *cured*.

That word cured is the Greek word SOZO and means to save, deliver or make whole. In this context it means much more than physical healing. It means complete *transformation* – physical, emotional and spiritual healing. Jesus did not simply fix a piece of him, he made him whole. Every area of his life was affected.

What is the message that we need to share with the whole world? God loves you, and He wants to set you free. That is what Jesus wants for all of us. He wants to transform us. All of us experience brokenness. All of us have bondages. It is part of living in a sinful world. We suffer from a variety of causes.

There are things WE have done which contribute to our brokenness. There are things which were done TO us, which have contributed to our brokenness. There are things which were PASSED on to us through our parents or culture which have bound us and contributed to our brokenness. There are things which were withheld FROM us which contributed to our brokenness. Whatever the hurt or pain, Jesus wants to heal us. He wants to set us free. He wants to make us whole. He can only do that when we bring our brokenness to Him.

Notice that when Jesus arrived, the man with the demons ran TOWARDS him, not away from Him. Unfortunately. We often run from the one who can help us. We choose to hang on to our hurts and pain instead of bringing them and giving them to Jesus.

It is said that years ago doctors would test the sanity of a mental patients with the following test: The patient was placed in a room with a sink. The faucet was turned on and a stopper was put in the drain until the sink overflowed. The patient was then handed a mop and the door was closed.

If the patient had enough sense to shut off the water, pull the plug, and then mop up the water, he was considered capable of going home. But on the other hand, if the patient mopped like crazy and never bothered to shut off the water and/or pull the plug, he was considered still insane and needed to be detained a little longer in the mental institution.

There are people in this world that are mopping like crazy... and they're not in mental institutions. They're people who we'd consider quite sane but they are plagued by their own personal demons, and they haven't figured out how to stop the flooding in their lives.

They know there's a problem they just haven't figured out where to go to solve it. They're like people who came and found the demoniac clothed and in his right mind. They see what Jesus can do in a person's life - but then they send Him away.

Like the movie clip we started with, Mendoza cannot get rid of his guilt. His sin is a bondage that he has to drag around with him. Instead of getting rid of it, he chooses to hold on to it instead of finding forgiveness and freedom.

In his book Fuzzy Memories, Jack Handey writes: There used to be this bully who would demand my lunch money every day. Since I was smaller, I would give it to him. Then I decided to fight back. I started taking karate lessons. But then the karate lesson guy said I had to start paying him five dollars a lesson. So I just went back to paying the bully. Too many people feel it is easier just to pay the bully than it is to learn how to defeat him.

3. Jesus Wants to USE You

Mark 5:18-20 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Talk about a testimony. This guy went from a naked, crazy, demon possessed monster to a model for what the grace of God can do.

What is our message? God loves you and wants to free you. He has done it in my life and He can do it in yours. God has a wonderful plan for your life. He wants to use you to make a difference in the life of someone else.

Chuck Swindoll tells this story - Jesus met the man in the tombs, healed him, cast the demons out. Now he is a sane man. Now he can take his place in society. I can imagine him coming home that evening after he met Jesus. His children look out the window and the cry out, "Mother, father is coming." She runs and locks the door. She tells the children, "Don't be afraid, the door is locked, He can't hurt you!" The children are still looking out the window. They say, "Mother that isn't like father at all. He isn't running and yelling and screaming. He's calm. He's walking slowly. He's very quiet. "Keep still!" mother whispers. Their hearts beat faster as they hear his hand upon the latch. The door will not open, the man knocks gently. His wife does not answer the door. She remains still, hoping he will go away. Then he says, "Mary, open the door. I am all right now. I met Jesus today and I am a changed man." She fearfully opens the door while the children shrink in the corner. The man says, "Don't be afraid children. I met Jesus today, and I am different now." They approach timidly. He puts his arms around them and loves them. He speaks kindly to his wife and with a prayer of thanksgiving she prepares supper. When they sit down at the table he bows his head and says a blessing. They talk until bedtime then he gathers them around him and thanks God for the miracle that has happened. They put the children to bed. He sits with his wife beside the fireplace. He takes her hand. He says, "Thank God Mary, the old life is over. I met Jesus today and now I am a changed man."

Notice that it says that the man not only went home to his own family like Jesus had told him to do, he also began to tell in the Decapolis what had happened to him. The Decapolis was a huge area which included 10 cities to the east of Israel in present day Syria and Jordan. This man's life was transformed, and he wanted to share what had happened to him with everyone near and far.

In the video we saw at the beginning, Mendoza is dragging around that burden of guilt and shame. He has dragged it through the jungle, and eventually up the waterfall where he comes face to face with the native people that he used to kill and enslave. He expects he will be killed for what he has done, instead he finds mercy.

VIDEO CLIP

Mendoza received what he did not deserve. He received mercy. Freedom from his burden. You can see the effect it had on him. That experience changed his life. He goes on through the rest of the movie to be a protector of the native people.

That is what happens when we experience love. It changes us. It transforms us.

I heard the story of a guy who, when he was growing up., hated vegetables. His parents tried everything they could think of to get him to eat vegetables but nothing worked. They tried to bribe him, they threatened him. Nothing worked. Then in University he met a girl called Linda. She would have him over to her parents house for dinner. She would look at him and say, "Aren't you going to eat your vegetables?" So he would. Soon he wasn't even thinking about what he was doing. One Sunday he went out for lunch with his parents. They were going through the line at a buffet when Linda looked at him and said, "Aren't you going to have a little broccoli?" Bam, on to the plate it went. As he put it on his plate he saw his mother grab his father's arm. He asked what was wrong, and with a look of shock she said, "You're eating vegetables." Later she told him "I knew you were in love when you were willing to eat your vegetables for her." Love makes us do things that we wouldn't normally do and it is not a burden doing them but a blessing. That is what happens when we experience the love of God.

People who experience the love and touch of Jesus are willing to share it. It gives them new found courage and strength. It makes them bold.

I read a story of a soldier in WWI who was so distraught with the war that he deserted! He tried to find his way to the coast so he could catch a boat, make his way back home to England. In the darkness of the night he stumbled on a road sign. It was so dark and he was so lost, he had no idea what the sign said and decided to climb the pole. When he got to the crossbeam, he held on to read the sign! Took out a match, lit it, and looked directly into the face of Jesus. He had climbed an outdoor crucifix! Stunned by what he saw, he realized the shame of his life! He was looking into the face of the One who had endured it all and had never turned back. The next morning, the soldier was back in the trenches.

One character in the bible that understood the transforming power of Jesus was Lazarus. Jesus raised him from the dead. Did you ever wonder what became of him? Years ago I had the chance to visit the island of Cyprus. There in the city of Larnaca is a church called the church of Saint Lazarus. History tells us that Lazarus was forced to flee Judea because there were people who wanted to kill him to silence his testimony. He fled Israel and went to the Island of Cyprus were he preached the Gospel of Jesus, eventually establishing a church and becoming a bishop there in Larnaca. He lived for more than 30 years there and then died and was buried a second time. His tomb is still there today. The inscription on his tomb reads "Lazarus, four days dead. A friend of Jesus."

Like the demon possessed man, we have been set free. Like Mendoza a heavy weight has been released. Like Lazarus we have been given new life. Let's go and tell the world the good news that God loves you, that God wants to free you and that God has a plan for your life.