

The Message for Sunday, June 20, 2010

Title: “The Power of a Transformed Person”

Scripture: Luke 8:34-39

I. Transformed... Stan Lee once said, “I always felt that if I had super-power, I wouldn’t immediately run out to the store and buy a costume.” (<http://www.quotesdaddy.com/author/Stan+Lee>) That is ironic since Stan Lee (b. 1922) made a career out of writing about people with super powers—and who wore costumes!

Two of the most successful movie franchises of recent decades have been about people with super powers: Spider-Man and Iron Man. They are based on comic books Stan Lee co-created with other people at Marvel Comics (notably, Steve Ditko, Larry Lieber, Don Heck and Jack Kirby).

The interesting thing about Spider-Man and Iron Man is that they are ordinary people who have been transformed into people with super-human powers. And, if you think about it, many of the super heroes of comic books, cartoons, and movies are transformed people. Captain America happened when a sickly young man (named Steve Rogers) was enhanced with an experimental serum that brought him to the peak of human perfection in order to help the United States with war effort in the 1940.

Other early super heroes like Batman (aka Bruce Wayne) the Green Lantern (aka Alan Scott), and the great-nephew to the Lone Ranger, the Green Hornet (aka Britt Reid) were ordinary humans with no special powers of their own. But all of these super heroes, whether enhanced with super powers or simply enabled with special equipment, were all transformed by something that happened to them.

II. My nomination... Into this category of super hero I would like to nominate one other person. We do not know his name, but we are given a very extensive picture, not only of what happened to transform him, but also of what that transformation led him to do.

In 1986, because of a drought in Galilee, the waters of the Sea of Galilee receded, leaving an area of mud around the perimeter of the lake. There the archaeologists found the almost-complete remains of a 1st century A. D. fishing boat, similar to the ones that would have been used by Jesus and the Disciples. It is a boat just like the one Jesus got into and said, “Let’s go to the other side.”

When they arrived on the other side of that great, inland fresh water lake, a man of the city, plagued with demons stepped out to greet them. The Gospel tells us that the city authorities kept him shackled; but many times he escaped. When he did, he would take up residence in the tombs outside of the city. There, he survived the best he could. He had the appearance of a wild, deranged person.

When we think of the area of the tombs, we can not think of the cemeteries around here. Every city had a necropolis, or a “city of the dead,” usually just outside the city walls. This area was normally a fairly large area with stone boxes or larger, stone buildings in which the dead had been buried.

While the area of Galilee was an area of Jewish people, the other side of the Sea of Galilee was inhabited by people who worshipped the gods and goddesses of the Greeks and Romans. Even then, their cemeteries were no place for people to live. And yet, it would have been possible for this deranged fellow to find shelter in some of the larger mausoleums.

When this man saw Jesus, amazingly he knew him! Jesus told the unclean spirits to come out of the man, and he responded by crying out, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I’m begging you, don’t torment me!”

Jesus then said, “What’s your name?”

The man said, “Legion.” That was not his real name. Because the man had so many problems with his mind and body, the people had begun to refer to him as Legion—a clear reference to the number of soldiers in a Roman Legion. That varied between 4,200 and 5,200 men.

Jesus healed the man by casting all of his infirmities into a herd of pigs. The pigs rushed into the Sea of Galilee and were drowned. When the owners of the pigs saw this, they ran into city and begin to tell what had happened. A disaster of such magnitude was unimaginable; and everyone came out to the area of the tombs to see for themselves.

The Gospel says that when they got there, they found the healed man clothed and in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus. This frightened them. In fact, it frightened them so much that they asked Jesus to leave. So, Jesus got back in the boat.

As he was about to leave, the man whom he had healed begged Jesus to take him along. But, Jesus told the healed man to go back to his home and declare to everyone what God had done for him. The last verse of our passage says that he went away, proclaiming throughout the city what Jesus had done for him.

III. The healed man was transformed... The story is, in my opinion one of the most dramatic healing stories in the New Testament. But, there is more to the story—although people do not usually connect this story with something that happens later.

Matthew (8:28-9:1) also tells the same story of the healing of the man on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. But, we have to turn to Mark for the rest of the story. (The story of the healing is in Mark 5:1-20. The rest of the story begins later in the 6th chapter of Mark.) Just like Matthew and Luke, Mark tells of Jesus returning to Galilee for the continuation of His ministry. But, at the end of the 6th chapter in Mark, there is a brief report of a subsequent trip to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

We remember how Jesus left the people standing on the other side. They were afraid and demanding that He return to his own country. This time, when Jesus got out of the boat on this second trip to the other side, people saw him, recognized him and rushed back into their cities. But this time, they began to bring their sick to him. Mark then says, “And wherever he went, into villages or cities, or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplace and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak. And, all who touched it were healed.”

What is going on here? The first time they saw Jesus heal someone, they were afraid and asked Him to leave. The very next time Jesus returned, they rushed out to greet Him, and then began to bring their sick so that He could heal them. There is only one

explanation. The man whom Jesus refused to allow to get in the boat but sent away so that he could declare what Jesus had done for him obviously did just that. He not only went back into his own city, but went throughout the cities of Decapolis—as this area was called—and told the people how he had been touched by the Master. This healed man was so transformed that he was empowered to transform others.

IV. A transformed man... Truly transformed people make a difference. Consider little Al. He was born into a family of inventors. His father was the man who invented modern plywood. Al soon developed a passion for weaponry and established a business for arms manufacturing. Eventually, he invented a stable way of incorporating nitroglycerin into an inert substance, which he wanted to call Nobel's Safety Powder.

Alfred went on to become a very famous and prosperous man. In 1888, his brother, Ludwig, died while visiting Cannes, and a French newspaper erroneously printed Alfred's obituary. The obituary stated that "The merchant of death is dead," (*Le marchand de la mort est mort*), and then it went on to condemn him for his invention of dynamite. The obituary continued to say, "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday." (Golden, F.: "The worst and the brightest," *Time Magazine*, 16 October 2000)

This made Alfred Nobel consider a better legacy for when he really was gone. On the 27th of November, 1895, never having been married and having no heirs, he signed his last will and testament in Paris, setting aside the vast majority of his estate to establish the Nobel Prizes for contributions to science, medicine, literature and peace.

The shock, not only of seeing his death notice, but of seeing one so scathing and judgmental, transformed him. The transformation empowered him not only to make a difference, but it encouraged others also to make a difference.

V. xxxxx... Not too long ago, I was reading a sermon about what the preacher had called "a Jacuzzi Jesus." He said that "the last thing some people want from their religious experiences is disruption and challenge." What many really want is a "Jacuzzi Jesus," which is "an experience that will leave them relaxed, warm, bubbly, [and] at the same time, feeling fit and trim when they get out... kinda' like they have gotten themselves in shape." (*Bibelot*, Vol.3 No.6, 1988, p.2., and quoted in "In Christ, or in a Jacuzzi Jesus?" Sunday, June 16, 1991, www.homileticsonline.com) He went on to say that people want their souls to feel soothed, not stirred, by their encounter with Christ. But, that is not transformation.

Donald J. Shelby of Santa Monica, California, quoted an anonymous writer who said, "I would like to buy only \$3.00 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine.... I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack." ("In Christ, or in a Jacuzzi Jesus?" Sunday, June 16, 1991, www.homileticsonline.com)

Writing to the church at Corinth, in his second letter, Paul said, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new Creation: Everything old has passed away; see everything has become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17) To be "in Christ," means having the Holy Spirit infiltrate our entire being. It means having every cell of our bodies and every ounce of

our souls transformed from the inside out. And yet, the last thing many people want from their experience with Christ is disruption and change.

In a report by the Barna Research Group there was exposed a gap between what Americans say they believe about God and how they live their lives. The report is entitled, “The Church Today: Insightful Statistics and Commentary.” It says that “At the same time Americans profess to see the Bible as accurate, relevant, and helpful, they have problems making time to study it, concentrating enough to comprehend it, committing themselves to adhere to it, or jeopardizing their social status by openly supporting it.” And then it says, “The theological ignorance and spiritual anemia that results makes religious and spiritual beliefs exist as a mythical reality more than a substantive reality.” (“In Christ, or in a Jacuzzi Jesus?” June 16, 1991, www.homileticsonline.com)

VI. xxxxx... So, what difference is this supposed to make? Only transformed people have the power to transform the world. We live in an age of fear. We claim to be the strongest nation on earth, and yet we live with so many fears everyday. We fear for our safety; we fear for our economy. We fear for the stability of our marriage, our home, our children and family. We fear that other faiths will overtake our community.

These are legitimate fears—and they will threaten to undo us, as individuals and as a nation, unless we have a relationship with Christ, become transformed by his power, and then go out as transformed people to make the world a world for Christ.

We live in a culture that says, super heroes have costumes. What should be our costume? Writing to the Church at Ephesus, Paul said, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:13-17)

Only then will you have the power of a transformed person—transformed by Christ. Amen.

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