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Don't Keep the Faith

FOCUS

Jesus tells the man healed from demons to go home and tell them what happened, and he sends out the 70. Jesus' vision of God's kingdom called for inner peace as well as peacemaking.

SCRIPTURES

Luke 8:26-39, 10:1-16

Open Up

For the second week in a row, let's just be honest. Today, I want to say that it would be easier just to keep the faith. Just to keep it to myself.

There's something about Mennonites and being humble and not talking about ourselves, which includes not talking about what God has done for us. We don't want to draw attention to ourselves. And when somebody does, it's easy for me to say that person is bragging. Don't brag to me about your faith. I sure hope you have a good strong connection with God. Keep the faith. Keep it to yourself.

REFLECT

Pass around the box of crayons and ask each person to take a crayon out that represents how willing they are to share their faith, and how much they share their faith. (If people struggle with this, suggest that a person could assume that dark colors mean lack of sharing and bright colors mean lots of sharing, but that's entirely up to them.)

Share the color you chose and why.

CLASS PREPARATION

1. Cue the song "Don't Keep the Faith" on *The Upside-Down King* video <http://upsidedownking.weebly.com/film.html> at 55:30 or on the CD.
2. AV equipment with speakers
3. Copies of the drama for session 6
4. Large box of crayons (to give away)
5. Copies of "A Book Opened a Door" (story for session 6)

Open the Story

Share the drama—Reproducible 1

Reflect together on the following questions. Come up with your own answers and thoughts before reading the commentary.

1. What was Jesus doing on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which was Gentile country?

The presence of pigs confirms that this was not a part of the country where a respectable Jew would hang out. Pigs were considered unclean animals and they were raised by Gentiles. Just as Jesus didn't "belong" in Samaria, he didn't "belong" in Gerasenes. And just as his presence brought healing to the woman at the well, he brought healing to the man who had demons.

Whether or not the man's condition would be described as a mental illness today or whether he was possessed by evil demons that even in today's world require exorcism, we don't know. What we do know is that God's power healed him.

2. Why was it okay for the owner of the pigs to lose them as a result of the man's healing?

This is a troubling question. There is loss of animal life, a financial loss for the hogs' owner, possibly the loss of a job for the swine-herder, and the loss of food for the community. And Jesus gave the demons permission to do that! Maybe the point here is that restoration can be costly to everyone, not just the one being restored to God. Churches reaching out to the poor and destitute will have costs involved when those who are economically and socially different from them attend their worship services, retreats, and times of fellowship. Including them can cost social comfort, financial resources, and maybe even the reputation of the church. Congregations who are open to undocumented citizens and refugees will have many costs involved in terms of time, energy, resources, and reputation. ⁱ

3. How can this story inform us about the "big picture" of Jesus' life and ministry that goes beyond the specifics of this one incident?

Jesus tells the man to "return to your home and declare how much God has done for you" (Luke 8:39 NRSV). The word translated "declare" is related to a word Luke uses to describe his own ministry in the first verse of his gospel: "Since many have undertaken to set down an *orderly account*" (Luke 1:1, emphasis added). The man who has been healed of the demons is to do what Luke is doing: declare what happened and provide an orderly account. ⁱⁱ

An orderly account is needed in this story, which is full of chaos and confusion. The man is a mess, running around without clothes, busting out of restraints, hollering and making a scene. Then, when the demons enter the pigs, the chaos and destruction continue until it ends with them thrashing and drowning in the lake.

Here are the powers of darkness lined up against Jesus. The destructive—and ultimately self-defeating—fury of evil forces end up being powerless before Jesus, even if they seem as formidable as a legion of Roman soldiers.

From beginning to end of the story of the Gerasene demonic, Jesus is clearly in charge, his triumph is assumed, and we hear the victory song of Psalm 2, which acclaims that the One “who sits in the heavens laughs” at those “who take counsel together, against the Lord and [God’s] anointed” (Ps. 2:4, 2). The Lord can laugh because the Lord knows that chaos and disorder have no future and the victory belongs to a kingdom of peace. ⁱⁱⁱ

4. Why didn’t Jesus let the man follow him and become a disciple?

Because following Jesus doesn’t mean just tagging along with him. Here, before he has even commissioned his own disciples to proclaim what God has done, Jesus instructs a Gentile to tell everyone what God has done for him. The boundary-breaking ministry that Jesus said he was about in his Nazareth declaration is being fulfilled again and again. He has brought new life to another person, whose appearance and testimony give witness to the one who sets captives free. ^{iv}

Song: “Don’t Keep the Faith” song lyrics available at upsidedownking.weebly.com/lyrics.html

Read: Luke 10:1-16

In this passage, Jesus appoints 70 disciples to go ahead of him to the places that he plans to go as well.

The instructions for this mission trip are tough, to say the least. They are heading into hostile territory, like lambs among wolves. They are not to carry a bag, purse, change of clothing, money, sandals, or a conceal/carry weapon—no provisions at all. Just be a lamb and head out into the pack of wolves.

When they get to a house/wolf den, their first words should be “Peace to this house.”

Was that just a standard greeting, like “How are you?” Or did Jesus mean that peace was at the heart of the mission?

Based on his other teachings, it seems safe to say that Jesus meant for peace to be the basis for all of their interactions with others. If, when the household is so greeted, there is an answering response of peace, then peace will rest on the person in the home. Otherwise, the peace returns to the disciples. Either way, the disciples’ mission is one of vulnerability, humbleness, and the sharing of peace. ^v

That’s *how* Jesus sent his disciples out. But *why*? Simply because more people needed to be empowered to spread the good news. And

the church today needs to be engaged in the same sort of empowerment and action. Too often Christians are shut up in sanctuaries, concerned about leaky roofs and outdated boilers, counting the attendance, and wringing their hands because people do not seem to be

worshiping God as they did in the past. Congregations spend so much time caring for their own and feeling anxious about their demise that they sometimes forget that they, like the 70, have been sent out with the gospel of God’s love and justice and mercy. The good news has been given to them for the world.

How can we get out of the pews and join in the mission of God to the world? How, like the 70, do congregations recognize and embrace their active participation in the reconciling work of God beyond the narrow confines of their own fears and needs? ^{vi}

REFLECT

- How has your congregation joined in God’s mission to the world?
- What are new areas of mission your congregation could explore?

Open Road Ahead

Read “A Book Opened a Door”—Reproducible #2

REFLECT

- Do you have a story like this? If so, share it with the group. If not, what keeps you from having stories of sharing your faith? Choose another crayon that represents a goal, whatever it might be, of a way that you can share your faith. Take the crayon home and place it where it reminds you not to keep the faith—not to keep it to yourself.

SENDING

Listen to the song “Don’t Keep the Faith” again.

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- Cynthia A. Jarvis & E. Elizabeth Johnson, Eds., *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke, Volume 1*. A Feasting on the Word Commentary (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 238.
 - Ibid.*, 237.
 - Ibid.*, 241.
 - Ibid.*, 240.
 - Mary Schertz, *Luke*. Believers Church Bible Commentary (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, forthcoming), 86.
 - Jarvis & Johnson, *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke, Volume 1*, 286.



SESSION 6 Drama—Reproducible #1

Characters: TV news reporters 1 and 2, swine herder, local person, man who was healed

Reporter 1: I'm here on location with breaking news in Gerasenes, where there's just been a dramatic incident resulting in the death of a large herd of hogs. Apparently, they were suddenly spooked and simply ran down the hillside, into the lake, and drowned. We have a person here who witnessed the entire event herself. Can you tell us what you saw?

Swine herder (still in a state of distress): It's my job to watch the pigs. Everything was normal—they were just snuffling along, rooting around, doing what pigs do. Then, in one instant, they all stopped eating, and started squealing and screaming. Then they just started running, and they went straight over that embankment over there, fell into the lake, and drowned! It was horrible!

Reporter 1: It is horrible indeed! Has this ever happened to other hogs? What could possibly have caused them to do this?

Swine Herder: No, I have never seen or heard of this before. It's like they just all simultaneously went crazy!

Reporter 1: Such a loss of life and livelihood! Do you know what their value might have been?

Swine Herder: More than I can ever pay. My boss is going to kill me for allowing this to happen.

Reporter 1 (turns to local person): Sir, you live in this community. Can you shed any light on what happened here today?

Local person: Shortly before the hogs went crazy, there was a strange man hanging out around here. He was a Jew, and Jews just don't come here. I don't know what he was doing here. But I have to wonder if somehow, he was connected to what happened.

Reporter 1: But how?

Local person: I don't know. But it's just too coincidental.

Reporter 1: That's what we have here. Now, to our reporter on site in the nearby village.

Reporter 2: We've had a disruption here as well, and I have the man at the center of it all here with me. What can you tell us, sir?

Man who was healed: For as long as I can remember, I have been mentally sick. So sick that I couldn't live with anyone, and I lived like a wild man. The tombs were my home. I stole food where I could, didn't bother to wear clothes, and no one could contain me with chains.

Reporter 2: But . . . look at you now! What happened?

Man who was healed: A stranger, a Jewish man named Jesus, showed up on the shore of the lake. I saw him coming, and ran to see who it was. Nobody comes here without me knowing it. I screamed at him! Told him to leave! Get away! But he wouldn't leave and he wasn't afraid of me like other people usually are. He asked my name and I told him it was Legion because I was full of mental illness. The bad spirits in me were screaming at him, and they started begging him to send them into the herd of pigs that was grazing nearby. And . . . that's what happened!

Reporter 2: The bad spirits left you and went into the pigs?

Man who was healed: Yes.

Reporter 2: And where is this Jesus now?

Man who was healed: The people around here were scared of him, and what he'd done. They told him to get out of town. So, he got in his boat and left again. I really wanted to go along. He saved my life . . . I wanted to go with him. But he wouldn't let me. He told me to go home and tell everybody what God did for me.

Reporter 2: He said *God* did this for you?

Man who was healed: Yes.

Reporter 2: I thought this was a Jewish guy.

Man who was healed: It was.

Reporter 2: With all due respect, you must still be out of your mind, equating this Jewish guy named Jesus with the Lord God Almighty.

Man who was healed: With all due respect, I know what I am talking about. What Jesus does, God does. And what God does, Jesus does. I don't understand it, but I know it is true.

SESSION 6—Reproducible #2

A Book Opened a Door by Kathy Neufeld Dunn

On a recent flight, I was reading Sara Miles's autobiography, *Take This Bread: A Spiritual Memoir of a Twenty-First-Century Christian*. Toward the end of the flight, my seat mate asked me what I was reading. I showed her the book and gave her the briefest of summaries. "It's about a journalist who walks into an Episcopal Church out of sheer journalistic curiosity. She'd grown up atheist. She found new life and hope and Jesus at the communion table. Now she's a deacon feeding hundreds of people through their food pantry."

"Huh," she responded, sounding skeptical. "Sounds like something my mother's book club would like."

"Um, maybe," I ventured. Then I let her read a paragraph about the author's troubled early life as a war zone correspondent.

"Oh, no! That's not for my mom."

Then my seat mate asked me why I was reading it. I told her that I appreciated the way that Miles' new-found faith connected with her life in very practical, and frankly, very complex ways as she recognized the connections between physical hunger, feeding others, and the way God feeds and nurtures us.

"This woman's experience seems *real* to me," I said. "It's not an easy, fluffy faith."

"Huh." My seat mate looked more thoughtful and fell silent.

I thought the conversation was over because our flight was coming to an end, then she asked me where I was headed to, and I asked her the same. As we talked about our homes and families, all of a sudden, she told me about her recent experience in Easter worship with her mother, which had not been a positive one. I asked what might have been more meaningful to her at Easter worship?

"Maybe talking about *hope* on Easter!" Then she got teary as she talked about her dad's recent death.

Suddenly, we were deep into the spiritual concerns of life, death, and new life. I was grateful for the chance to listen and minister to my seat mate. But she wasn't finished with her faith questions. As the plane touched down, she asked,

"Do you really think there are churches that are *real*?"

"Yes, I do. I've been part of several."

"Who did you say you're with again?"

"Mennonite Church USA."

"Huh," and she smiled.

A book opened a door to a missional conversation. We never know when the Holy Spirit might nudge open a door to a person's heart and mind. You never know when you might be given the opportunity to "give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). When we have the courage to tell others what God has done for us, how the Holy Spirit has strengthened us and brought us peace, and how Jesus has given us new paths to walk in his way in the real lives we lead, more doors might appear.

Don't be afraid. Be real. Talk about your faith and the hope that you have in Christ when you're given the opportunity.