

Luke 8:26-39 - “*Fathering*”  
- Pastor Ken Nelson

Comedian Bill Cosby wrote a book back in the 1980’s entitled “*Fatherhood*”. It’s a humorous and engaging look at fathering worthy of any man’s attention, even today. “Fatherhood”, Mr. Cosby wrote, is

- Pretending your favorite gift is an Old Spice “soap on a rope”.
- Helping your children learn English...as a second language.
- Asking your son to make up a sir-name rather than let on to anybody who he really is.
- Telling your daughter that Michael Jackson loves all his fans, but is especially fond of the ones who eat vegetables. (Today, we might insert Justin Bieber or Taylor Lautner into that statement, but you get the point).

The premise of Mr. Cosby’s book, and what makes it relevant even today, is that fathering is about being strong without being harsh. Fathering is living with character when words fail, as they often do for men. Fathering is being steady without being unyielding. And if I might impart a spiritual angle to what Mr. Cosby wrote, fathering is realizing that the word “discipline”, “*a condition of order based on adherence to authority*” according to Webster’s, which fathers are supposedly famous for, comes right after the word “disciple” in that dictionary. And to disciple is “*to pattern your own behavior after that of your master*”. Christian “fathering” embraces the latter, patterning your life after Jesus Christ, thus giving the former its meaning, depth, validity...and a much better chance at being accepted as done in love.

I realize I’m taking a bit of a risk bringing a message about fathering to you from a lesson about a demon possessed man. But then again, what is the countenance of a guy on a shopping trip with daughters or getting another call from the school secretary about the latest escapade of a son? Would not “*demon possessed*” seem to describe his mood at that moment? But there is a convergence between this story from Luke and the experience of a man today. At the spiritual level, the man in our story was in a self-imposed exile. Not willing to be “confined” by the chains of his townspeople, he chose a hollowed out existence in the tombs, with demons he thought were his friends.

I am thankful for all of you who are here today, or who are listening to us over the radio. But the simple fact is most of you here or listening today are women, by a fairly good margin. 70% of the congregations in America today find that to be the case. 60% of Americans who say they are uninterested in or unaffiliated with any religious tradition are men. Less than 15% of those serving as a Sunday or Wednesday School Teacher in congregations today are men. In their employment, if they are full time, men on average spend almost 45 minutes more per day at work than women and when they have time off spend on average 45 minutes more than women in front of the TV. Spiritually they are in exile, perhaps self-imposed, perhaps not. Whatever the case, men have (or continue) to choose other allegiances; recreation, career, sleep...over worship of the one true God...mainly the worship that happens in here but also the worship that happens “between the lines”, between Sunday mornings that is.

Yet men continue to be the ones looked to for discipline in the family. But how can the Christian man discipline, (that is, *create a sense of order based on adherence to authority*) if he is not first

discipled (that is, *pattern his own behavior after that of his master*)? Our story from Luke makes it clear that the man in the tombs is serving lesser powers, and that Jesus is clearly the greater power. So what is the problem? Is the church today, like the Gentile community in our lesson, afraid of men? Do our church rituals and traditions shackle men, so as to keep the church community predictable and safe? Do we opt for more feminine words like “heal” and “relationship” above “mission”, or “call” or “challenge”?

If unshackled from the church and from faith, many men seek life in pastimes; hobbies, careers, affairs; they are alive but purposeless. But look at what happens when the man in our story is discipled by Jesus Christ. He’s raring to go, you might even say; “he’s juiced”. He is free from expedient but empty allegiances. He is ready to follow Jesus anywhere, yet obedient enough to go where he was sent...which was probably the tougher of the two options. He went back to the community most familiar to him... and with him. We cannot generalize about how Jesus calls a person...man or woman. Call is unique to the one called. But let this story exemplify “*fathering*” for us, in that the man bravely brought his faith in Jesus to situations or places he might have not felt so comfortable in before. For scores of men today, that includes the church. It’s as if the church doesn’t know what to do with men...and men are not quite sure how they fit it church. Our lesson from Luke calls us to change that situation.

On Mother’s day, when we spoke of “mothering”, I suggested there were three categories...physical, relational and spiritual. The same three apply to fathering. Nothing in our story from Luke should be construed to attach only to men who are biological fathers. “*Fathering*”, whether physical, relational or spiritual, applies to all men and all ages of them. It is a frightening but thrilling endeavor...a vocation unto itself. For any man to have the courage to say what the Lord has done for him, and pair it with active determination to do something for him, is the essence of fatherhood, and the call of today’s gospel. Edward Everett Gale said it this way; “*You are only one, but you are one. You cannot do everything, but you can do something*”. Gentlemen, we thank God for you today. We need you around this town, this community and this congregation. To the glory of our always faithful heavenly Father.  
AMEN