

## Trinity 4 Human Boxes (the Gadarene demoniac)

### Luke 8 26-39

Luke 8v35: 'Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind'.

My house has been full of cardboard boxes for months, those big cardboard packing cases you use for moving house. 9 of them, in our lounge and dining room, contain the contents of our kitchen, while the workmen put in new kitchen units. Most contain the possessions of my daughter as she moves out of her flat; her fiancé tells me she's refused to throw out *and therefore* packed a load of junk along with her prized items... in 21 boxes all stacked in our guestroom (alongside 8 big bags).

My life is surrounded by big cardboard boxes, just like this one.

I have become *obsessed* by big cardboard boxes.

Is it any wonder then that today's Gospel story of Jesus and the homeless person who behaved like a madman and the herd of unclean animals, reminds me of ... big cardboard boxes. It seems to me that the homeless man was *exactly* like a big cardboard box filled with junk... for reasons I'll go into later.

The Franciscan writer, Richard Rohr (in *Falling Upwards*, ISBN 978-0-470-90755-7) says that life is like a big box; your life is a box, my life is a box.

We spend the first half of our lives constructing our boxes. We build bigger and better boxes. We get on in our careers; we build relationships and families; we acquire possessions and wealth; and *we help our children* learn to build better boxes of their own.

Building our boxes can take up most of our time. Sometimes we can barely cope with a life so full of box-building: we get overstretched, lose a sense of proportion and get over-stressed. Many in SPH are in exactly that position; I've been there, done that, & got the T-shirt.

Rohr calls box building our first half of life agenda, centring on 3 things:

- IDENTITY – WHO WE ARE AS PEOPLE: our distinctiveness, our skills, our appearance, the roles we play
- SECURITY – HOW WE MAKE OURSELVES FEEL VALUED: our work, our education, our friends & allies, our home & possessions, our church-going and religious security-seeking in knowing things *about* God
- SEXUALITY – AND OUR EMOTIONAL LIFE: our own sexuality, our intimate relationship building, our family life, and the comfort we gain from being with another human being and just not being alone.

Some people spend their entire lives just constructing a bigger and better box, a bigger and better life for themselves: More power, a bigger profile in the community, bigger houses, expensive possessions, greater knowledge (including knowledge *about* God), a trophy partner, a perfect family, successful kids etc. They continue with their first half of life agenda *throughout* their lives.

Many people, however, realise at some point in their lives that building a bigger and better box is not enough.

They ask themselves: What is my box for? What is my *life* for?

They realise that the box is there to contain things we value, things that will last; things with a *spiritual* value that will last through eternity. It doesn't matter if it is a bigger and better box than anyone else's; it is what the box *contains* that is *all* that really matters.

They also see that the box they have constructed is either empty, or contains a load of unsatisfying junk, and understandably, they want something better.

These are the people who begin to move on to (what Rohr calls) the second half of life agenda: Filling their box with stuff which lasts; and, if necessary, emptying their box of worthless junk. They do *practically* what Jesus called 'laying up treasure in heaven', which lasts. They know God as opposed to *know about God*. They learn how to be with God beyond our physical death; training, like the mystics, for the life of eternity with God, when our own cardboard box has gone off for recycling.

Which brings me back to today's Gospel.

It seems to me that the life of the homeless man was full of worthless junk; demons, in the terminology of the day. His box, his life, contained little of lasting value. But he knew about God, he recognised Jesus *as soon as he saw him*, and called out to him.

Jesus immediately saw that the cardboard box of the man's life was filled with junk. So he emptied the box of the junk, and neatly filed the junk along with other *unclean* material, namely a heard of pigs.

Now that the man's box was empty, he could sit at the feet of the Jesus whom he'd recognised, listen directly to him, learn directly from him, and fill the box of his life with things of lasting spiritual value.

*'Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind'.*

He was transformed.

The man could *recognise* Jesus *before* the personal encounter; but only afterwards was he uncluttered enough to *listen* to Jesus properly, and to fill his life-box and to change his ways as a result.

De-cluttering our lives is perhaps one of the biggest spiritual steps we can take.

Some of you today will be fed up with building bigger and better boxes, fed up with *having no time for anything other than* box-building; you have outgrown your first half of life agenda.

Some of you will want to unclutter your life, to throw away some of the junk in your box and replace it with spiritual treasure that lasts.

Some of you will be well into your second half of life agenda; developing your spirituality; wanting to know God rather than know *about* God; learning how to live with God throughout eternity, beyond the lifetime of your cardboard box.

If you are interested in de-junking and developing your own spirituality, your second half of life agenda, (or indeed if you want to discuss your Christian box-building first half of life agenda) have a word with Mark, myself, or one of the Ministers here.

We are here to help you personally to equip yourself for eternity; by sitting at the feet of Jesus, by knowing God not just knowing *about* God, by finding your own spiritual pathway, and by filling your box with treasure which lasts for longer than your box itself.

...And if any of you want to help me to deal with Lydia's 21 cardboard boxes, or our own 9 big boxes, do *please* let me know!

*Rev Dr Ian A Bailey*