

5<sup>th</sup> October 2008

## **CHRISTIAN PRESENCE IN A SECULAR SOCIETY**

(Gen. 41:8-36, Ps 100, Acts 11:19-26, Mk. 5:1-20)

Bible clearly tells us what we have to be in this world. "You are my witnesses" declares the Lord, "that I am god" (Ps. 43:11). What an awesome responsibility. In fact everything else created have been doing the same without being told. Heavens declare the glory of God. Even the animals tell us that they are created by God (Job. 12:7). We are here in this world to display God's glory. When we lost our God given glory, Jesus came down to restore it and send us back into the world as agents of change and transformation. This work begins when we personally begin to be transformed when we renew our mind by obeying the good, pleasing perfect will of God (Rom 12:2). Gradually we become agents of transformation in our family. Then our family becomes an agent of transformation in the society. In this way life becomes a continuous witness of how God has been bringing change in our lives. We are in a world engulfed in darkness of lust of the eye, lust of the flesh and the pride of life. But Jesus said that we are to be light in this dark world. By the light it radiates at a place, every body know that that there is a lamp in that place. When there was pitch darkness in the Egyptian houses, there was bright light in the Israelite houses. Who ever sees the house they recognize immediately that it is an Israelite house. That is the way Christian houses should shine in this dark perverted generation. When the missionaries came to India, they reflected the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, by their dedicated service in the schools, Hospitals and orphanages, they opened. All the institutes were like burning lamps, shedding the love of Christ. Many were attracted to that light. Now the sad state of affairs is that all the lamps are blown off. Has not Church become darkness instead of light to the world and lost its savor as salt? Who is responsible?

In the days of Ezekiel God could not find some one to stand in the gap and fill in the cracks in the walls of righteousness, mercy and justice of the society, so that God could not destroy it. But we have many examples in the Bible, where individuals stood in the gap and saved the land. One such example is Joseph in to day's Old Testament lesson. Christians in today's epistle lesson are those called to stand in the gap between God's original intention for human beings to be fruitful, multiply fill and subdue the earth and Jesus the mediator's final restoration where in a new people fill and subdue earth with Him. That is they are to stand in the gap between the fallen creation of God and God intended new beginnings in Christ Jesus. The disciples of Jesus who were called Christians first in Antioch, were sent to serve in

the gap, regardless of its geographical, cultural or theological extremes that they might reconcile lost sinners to God through faith in the mediator. After he was restored, the Gerasene demoniac requested Jesus to allow him to be with him. But Jesus asked him to go and stand in the gap between God and his own members of the family.

God is calling every one of us to stand in the gaps caused by the cracks in the walls of righteousness, peace, equality and harmony of the lands and save them. That is how we can make our presence felt in the society today. This is the central theme of the message today.

### **Old Testament Lesson - Gen. 41:8-26**

## **OUR IDENTITY - THE GOD WHO IS WITH US**

If God's with us, then all things around us will be different. People recognize the specialty and the peculiarity in us. "A city in a hill can not be hidden" (Mt. 5:14). In the same way those who have Christ in them, they assert their presence by the light they shed in the society. God went where ever Joseph went. Bible tells us that Joseph prospered because God was with him, may it be the house of Potiphar, or prison, or a ditch in the Jungle.

We should never forget that we are the temples of God as the Holy Spirit lives in us. That means where ever we are there God will also be. Where God is, there are joy and eternal pleasures (Ps 16:11). By the smile we flash and the courage we display people recognize that we are with Jesus (Act 4:13). Same thing happened with Joseph, where he went people recognized a kind of specialty in him. People around us smoke, drink, and take bribes. If we also do the same, are we not one with them in the world. By the good works which reflect the righteousness Jesus gave us, people know that we are the people of the true sovereign God. Jesus said be ye perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.

Wherever, Joseph was, he reflected the fear of god of rare kind, and no wonder he was successful wherever he was. When Joseph told pharaoh the dreams he dreamt and interpreted them and also the measures to tackle the threatening famine, pharaoh recognized that Joseph had the spirit of God. By the spirit he had Joseph displayed extraordinary wisdom and knowledge.

Likewise we too can give the fragrance of the knowledge of Jesus and be recognized as victorious people of rare kind, if only we have Jesus in us. (2 Cor. 2:14,15). We find the early disciples of Jesus Christ in today's epistle were like that. Do we have the aroma of the

knowledge of Jesus Christ around us? Instead are we giving the bad odor of tobacco, and wine?

**Epistle lesson: Acts 11:19-20**

**FOLLOWERS OF JESUS NEVER GO UN NOTICED**

When Stephen was killed, persecution broke in the days of early Church. Many people were forced to go to different places like Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. How ever God was with them where ever they went, like He was with Joseph. Where ever they went many accepted Jesus Christ. Why is this not happening with us? Is not the reason obvious? God's not with us. In those days there were Barnabas in the Church. Bible tells us that he is the one who has sold his property and gave it to the Church (Acts 4:37).The name 'Barnabas' means "son of exhortation" and his life reflects this trait. He is a great encourager. Had he not welcomed Paul when every one was suspicious about him, we don't know how the course of Church history would have been. Once when Paul refused to take John Mark because he left them during their first missionary journey. Barnabas encouraged Mark. Later Paul himself admitted that he was useful to him. How wonderful will it be if people like Barnabas are in our churches! By now our churches should have evangelized our country. Sadly in our churches we have people who are after selling the church property for their selfish gain. In that case what impact can have our churches on the society?

In the early days of the church age, Romans used to call the disciples by the nick name "Christians" meaning " little messiahs". The translation of the Greek word is the word Christian. The word also means Christ ones, because all they had in common was Christ, not race, culture or even language. Romans around them used to wonder at their simple life style, broad mindedness, and the joy they had. They were surprised at their being not interested in making money, but all the time sharing the message that can bring change in people. That is how Christianity spread to the four corners of the world. Is not our church growth purely biological instead of due to spiritual reproduction? Why we are not bothered about soul winning? The reason once again is obvious we haven't completely surrounded our lives to Christ. Instead of being the temples of God we have become the abodes for Satan and his angels. But God is coming to us once again today to drive the devil from our lives. This is today's gospel lesson.

## **The Gospel lesson: Mark 5:1-20**

### **WE ARE THE WITNESSES OF THE MIGHTY GOD**

If God the Holy Spirit is not living in us, who else will be there? Satan and his demons, of course. One will go and bring another. Jesus, who made the Gerasene Demonic whole, can do the same with us, as many who haven't accepted Jesus Christ are like the Gerasene Demonic, abodes of Satan. They live among the tombs. They cut themselves. That is they injure themselves. They will never care to listen to any one. Spiritually are not many in this state? But today our merciful Jesus has come once again to heal us. Satan tries to keep us always in his control. On the other hand Jesus is making every effort to change us. Mark in his gospel has shown this cosmic struggle. God can destroy Satan any time. But the long suffering and patient God is giving time even to Satan to repent. Therefore that day Jesus gave a chance to the legion of demons by granting them their request to go into the swine. The lesson we learn from this is that Jesus is all powerful who can control Satan. Today he is asking us to recognize his power and be released from the bondage of Satan. He is asking us to become his temple, taste a miracle and proclaim first to our own people.

Society can be transformed only when every one in it are transformed which is possible only with Jesus. Therefore every one has to accept Jesus Christ. Those who have tasted the mercy of Jesus should first share it with their own people, then with their friends and then with the whole world. When the Gerasene demoniac started telling what Jesus has done to him through out the province of Decapolis and every one who heard him were amazed. I praise God. 25 years back I accepted Jesus Christ on 3rd September. In the month of December that same year I shared my experience with my parents. Now I humbly give thanks to God and testify that my Father, mother and five brother and many of my kith and kin accepted Jesus Christ. Over these 25 years I have been testifying my experience and I continue to do it. Those who have met me they too testify the wonderful change that the lord has brought in me. Praise god, he can change people like me any where in the world. So let us decide to follow him accepting him as our savior, and then we can make the right side of the world up. What is your decision today? May God bless you!

***(Jyothi Prakash Ethakoti)***