

# When Jesus says, “No, stay!”

9 July 2021

A story that has always stood out to me [Bob] from the gospels is of a demon-possessed man from the area of the Gerasene's, found in Luke chapter 8. It's a story full of surprising twists! After casting out a legion of demons from the man, the people who had been terrified and victimized by his demonic rages respond in an unexpected way: *They ask Jesus to leave them and go away!* Incredible! Why would they ask someone so powerful, with such authority over evil, to leave?

But the unexpected continues: When the formerly demon-possessed man asks Jesus to take him with Him, Jesus refuses! He responds, *“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.”* What???! Here's a guy who wants to follow Jesus, to serve Him and walk with Him, and Jesus says, “No, stay!” What's that about???



During the past year, we've all faced some surprising twists, haven't we? Carol and I returned from 8 years in Germany in September of 2019. We immediately began a new job with Converge, serving as Impact Team Leader for the Europe & Mediterranean Region. We expected to raise support to do that job, returning to Europe a year later. We would settle in Poland – to continue the Impact Team role and to assist in planting an international ministry center connected with a church in the city of Szczecin.

Then Covid-19 hit, and the world was turned upside down. During the 18 months we've worked from the USA and waited, God has done amazing things. The Impact Team Leader role has gone from a brand-new concept to a full-blown ministry. We're actively working with local gospel-movement leaders in Siberia, Ukraine, Israel, Egypt, Sweden, and more; in ministries of disciple-making, church planting, leader development, deaf ministries, humanitarian aid to refugees and poverty-stricken people.



While we were unable to relocate to Europe, we stayed with family members. In January we made our way to Central Illinois to be with my mom who was about to have hip replacement surgery. Mom was born with a congenital hip condition on her left side and has always had a limp and built-up shoe on that side, but it was the right hip that now needed replacing. The surgery went well, but two days later she fell and fractured her femur at the point where the new hip joint was attached. This has greatly slowed and hindered her recovery.

In addition, for the past 4 years, mom has been pooling income and sharing expenses with Jojo, a woman just a couple of years older than Carol and I, who has advanced Parkinson's disease. As we helped mom with her recovery, and cared for Jojo, it became obvious to us that mom would no longer be able to assist Jo, and that they were both going to need constant care and assistance. So, we began to search for a facility where they could go. We found one not too far away.

Then one Sunday morning a couple of weeks ago, I was sitting in a local church next to my mother (Jojo wasn't up to coming that day, so Carol was at home with her). The pastor was talking about leaving family, home, and everything to take up our cross and follow Jesus. I sat there mentally checking off all the boxes: *“yup, done that!”*, when Jesus interrupted my thinking and immediately questioned my motives and plans. There in the service, I realized that returning to Europe was primarily all about me – my desires, my pride, my comfort, my security – and not primarily about Him. Then I felt the Spirit ask, “What looks more like Jesus: putting your mom and Jojo in a home and going off to Europe, or staying here, and (literally) washing the feet



of two of His faithful servants?" I don't mind telling you I was crushed. When we returned home from church, I sat down with Carol and told her in tears what had happened. We knew we cannot, at this time, return to Europe. Instead, we will remain here.



But this update is not intended to let you know of something we will *not* be doing, but what we will *continue* to do! **God, in His mercy, has given us a position that allows us to faithfully serve gospel movement leaders in Europe & the Med Region from the USA, so that more people can meet, know, and follow Jesus.** We are still committed to the work in **Szczecin**, and will help with identifying, coaching, and encouraging someone to go in our place. In addition, we are seeing increasing opportunities to make a kingdom difference across the region. The **Ukraine** ministry that was the focus of our visit last month has resulted in the local pastor there expressing a desire to duplicate the training for other pastors and churches throughout their area. In **Siberia**, we are developing a Russian-language coaching curriculum that can be taught online through the Omsk Training Center. At Central Church in the city of Omsk, we are working with their deaf congregation (approx. 60 people) to develop deaf pastors, church planters, and lay leaders. We're building a strong relationship with **M4**, one of the most effective church planting movements in Europe. We also provide direct oversight and support to **8 Converge missionaries and 3 appointees** in Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Egypt. And we assist with the regional oversight and leadership of **95 missionaries in 25 countries**. We are so blessed to be able to serve the Lord, and care for mom and Jojo at the same time!

We humbly ask for your continued support. *We need your prayers!* We are asking God and working toward indigenous gospel movements in the 53 nations of the Europe and Mediterranean Region – the least-evangelized region on the planet!

*We also need your financial support!* Living and working from the USA will be more expensive than being in Poland. We are committed to serving sacrificially and faithfully to support those local movements and movement leaders. We covet your continued partnership in this ministry to help propel the gospel across an area of the world that is increasingly resistant and closed to it.



We realize that this may be a shock to you. It is to us, too! When we said, "Lord, we are willing to return to overseas ministry!" we did not expect Him to say, "No! Stay and serve Me there!" but He has. If you would like to talk with us about this change in our lives and ministry, please feel free to write or call us. Our contact information, as always, is found below.

Thank you for your prayerful support of us and this ministry!

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