

The Gospel of Mark

Sermon series can be found at asburybham.org/sermons

Scripture Reading

Mark 5:1-20

"They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.



When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighbourhood.

As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed."

Summary

As you read through the early chapters of Mark's Gospel, it becomes clear that Jesus is exactly who Mark said he is. He heals people from various diseases and he calms a storm with just a few words.

Today's story demonstrates that Jesus is the Son of the Most High God who can even command demons and force them out of the very man that they are tormenting.

What is shocking about this particular man is how his life has been ruined by this demonic possession. Mark tells us that he is not safe to be around. The people in the community have tried to shackle him, but he breaks the chains. He has moved out of town and lives in the dark tombs nearby where he howls at night and even harms himself.

When Jesus arrives on the shore, the man comes and bows before Jesus but the demons, named Legion, speak. They know who Jesus is and know that he has absolute authority, so they beg to not be sent to another region and suggest that they be allowed to enter into a large herd of pigs nearby.

Full of compassion for the man, Jesus commands the demons out of him. When they are gone, his life is restored. Mark tells us that he sits next to Jesus and is calm. The terror from before has been replaced by peace.

The people from the town hear about the pigs and the radical change in the formerly demon-possessed man and they are so afraid that they beg Jesus to leave and never come back.

This story of demonic possession is a difficult read for more modern readers, but the end result of the radical healing is truly remarkable. We are just left stunned by the actions of the people in the community.

Why do you think that the people in the town were so afraid of Jesus and his divine abilities and powers? Why was their fear of Jesus greater than their rejoicing over the man healed and freed from torment?

Discussion Questions

- In the first five chapters of Mark's Gospel, Jesus moves around the towns and cities surrounding the Sea of Galilee. It is a freshwater lake which the Jordan River passes through on its way down to the Dead Sea. So much of his early ministry is teaching and serving the working class folks that live near the sea. What does it say about Jesus that he cares so deeply about the people in this region?

- This passage takes place in an area of the Sea of Galilee populated by Gentiles. These are non-Jews that do not practice the Jewish faith, rituals, and practices. The ten cities that make up the Decapolis are all alike in that sense and the presence of pigs, which are unclean in Jewish Law, underscore that the people in this story are more than likely Gentile. What does it say about Jesus that he goes to and heals "outsiders"?

- The demons know that Jesus has supreme authority over them and they beg to be sent into the nearby herd of pigs. This reflects a belief that demon spirits had to possess a living being or they would be sent back to some dark and horrible abyss. What do you make of the pigs running into the sea and all dying?

- The people from the nearby town are so afraid of Jesus that they beg him to leave. We are not told by Mark's Gospel if they are afraid of Jesus because of the pigs and their death or because the healed man will be restored into their community. If Jesus is able to do wonderful things like heal this man, then why are some people (even to this day) so afraid of what Jesus can do?

- If you have read through the first five chapters of the Gospel of Mark with Asbury this Lent, discuss what you have learned or observed in a fresh reading. What have you seen with fresh eyes?

Prayer (ancient prayer by Augustine of Hippo, 4th century)

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I may love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, that I may defend all that is holy.

Guard me, O Holy Spirit, that I myself may always be holy. Amen.

Practice

- Rev. Mike Holly highlighted that Jesus goes to the “outsiders”. This week, notice who the “outsiders” are in your life. How can you show them they are noticed and loved?
- Ask yourself if you are fearful of Jesus. Is there something that Jesus may do that causes you pause? Spend the week reflecting on this thought. In your prayer time, explore any thoughts that may arise.

Lenten practices:

- Consider listening to the daily Lent meditation podcasts: asburybham.org/easter
- We are entering our fourth week of Lent. If you have been following along with the meditations, have you noticed a recurring message or word that continues to stand out to you? Pray and journal over the message/word.
- Journaling is a wonderful spiritual practice. Pick up your complimentary Asbury journal at any Welcome Center. After listening to the Lent meditations, write about the ways God is stirring in your heart.