

**“If Only . . . I Could Make a Difference” (The Good News of Purpose for Living)**

**Mark 5:1-20**

**Sunday, October 27, 2019**

Let’s take a closer look at Mark 5:1-20. The Good News that Jesus brings has multiple layers in this man’s life. At the start of this passage:

***[Jesus and the disciples] went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup> When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him.***

This has the makings of an incredible showdown. It’s like a stereotypical western – the strong and virtuous sheriff facing off against someone who’s evil incarnate. This is a showdown of supernatural proportions.

***<sup>3</sup> This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. <sup>4</sup> For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him.***

In the story this man is incredibly strong even when bound by heavy chains. No one can do anything with this man. He is uncontrollable. He is beyond any physical intervention. He’s too much for anyone to handle. He sounds terrifying – credit is due to anyone who tried to subdue him and help him out!

***<sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.***

As we learn more about the man and his life, we begin to see that he’s not really the villain here. He’s not a villain at all. He is a man under incredible torment and pain. He is mutilating himself. He is in physical and psychological and spiritual anguish. He is like a lot of people we know. He’s like the people we know that are abrasive and difficult and push people away, but as we get to know more of their story, we reach an understanding of why they are the way that they are. The saying “hurt people hurt people” seems to be physically personified in this man’s life. He’s also a hurt person causing further harm in his life (although in this instance much of that is out of his control).

***<sup>6</sup> When [the man] saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. <sup>7</sup> He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s name don’t torture me!” <sup>8</sup> For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”***

Jesus had spoken directly to the evil within the man: “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!” With this, the scene shifts from a showdown to an intervention! The man runs at Jesus, which must have been terrifying for everyone not named Jesus on the boat. The evil spirit inside of the man pleads for mercy. The evil spirit knows that Jesus has greater power and authority – the evil spirit has nothing with which to combat Jesus. We continue to see the evil spirit acknowledge the power and authority of Jesus in their continued conversation:

***<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”***

***“My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” <sup>10</sup> And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.***

Already the story has checked off all the boxes for my inner 12-year-old-boy. There's a showdown, there's action, there's the spectacular insanity of the man, there's immensity of the evil before the unstoppable Jesus.

And then the story really gets nuts.

**<sup>11</sup> A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside.**

Twelve year old Mark is increasingly intrigued! "Yes! A large heard of pigs! And what will happen to those pigs? Go on! Spare no detail!"

**<sup>12</sup> The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them."**

Legion realizes that there are limited options for them in their encounter with Jesus. Being sent into the pigs seems to be the best possible outcome for them.

**<sup>13</sup> He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs.**

Jesus grants the request of Legion. They needed his permission in order to do this. Can you imagine the disturbing chaos of this transaction? It would be the stuff of nightmares!

***The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.***

Wow! What an explosive demise for Legion (and for the pigs)! Twelve year old Mark is just buzzing with the craziness of this story!

Now adult Mark realizes these pigs are innocent, living things and feels badly for them. And adult Mark also realizes that this is a significant loss of income and work for someone. There is real loss introduced into the lives of others at this point.

All of us can see the jarring and deliberate contrast between the value of one human life over the lives of 2000 pigs.

But with all the sobering and all of the difficult realities in mind, can twelve year old Mark enjoy the spectacle, even just for one moment? (Thanks!)

**<sup>14</sup> Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened.**

The perspective in the story shifts. The camera pans from the pigs tumbling into the lake to the people who were tending the pigs. I can just imagine their stunned faces. Some real damage has been done here. A livelihood has been altered. A herd destroyed. There is massive collateral damage because Jesus has freed this man, because Jesus has saved a life.

**<sup>15</sup> When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind;**

An incredible transformation has taken place. People see this. This is the man they knew that could not be restrained, that could not be managed, who was damned to a life of isolation and harm, sitting before them, sane.

It's time for the community to celebrate, right?

***<sup>15</sup> When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind . . . and they were afraid.***

Let's get this straight. A man naked, living among the tombs, unrestrained, harming himself, disturbing the peace, super strong is **not scary?**

But a man that is seated quietly, clothed and in his right mind is **Scary?**

Of course people were scared of the man when he was possessed by Legion. But they seem more scared of the same man seated and clothed and in his right mind. After being used to the chaos that was this man's life, the peacefulness and stillness of his life is absolutely haunting. When you are used to perpetual disaster, there is something unsettling about sudden peace.

But it's not the man that people are scared of – it's Jesus that the people are scared of.

***<sup>16</sup> Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well.***

***Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.***

The people saw and knew the power of Legion. There was nothing they could do against Legion. The man was possessed with the most powerful, uncontrollable thing they could imagine.

And Jesus comes along and his power far surpasses that. He dismisses what was terrifying in an almost comical fashion. He takes what was impossible and disposes of it easily. The power of Jesus over what was terrifying was terrifying in and of itself.

The people just don't know what to do with Jesus. They are afraid and deeply unsettled and they ask him to leave.

***<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.***

Wouldn't you beg Jesus to take you with him? Jesus has given you life-saving and life-restoring freedom. You want to show your gratitude. The man who was enslaved to evil spirits now wants to give his life completely to Jesus. He has experienced what Jesus can do and wants to travel with Jesus, passing it on.

Or is his motivation to go with Jesus different than that? Is he wanting to go to serve? Or is he wanting to go to escape?

***<sup>19</sup> Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."***

At first it sounds like Jesus is blowing this guy off. It's almost an abandoning.

The people were scared of Jesus. Terrified. ***How much worse will it be for this guy?***

EVERYONE in the region knew the man's history. EVERYONE in the region knew his embarrassing and horrific past. EVERYONE had a reason to be suspect of and afraid of this man. Because of his known past, the man seems to be starting at a deficit with everyone in the region.

And yet Jesus tells him to stay. Stay and tell people what the Lord has done for you and how the Lord has had mercy on you.

***Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.*** So Jesus leaves. And the man is on his own. But the restored man takes what Jesus tells him to do and he does it!

***So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.***

Did you catch that? Did you hear what happened to the man? People actually listened to his story! They listened to what Jesus had done for the man and they were amazed. **The healed man spoke to people that even Jesus could not speak to!**

Jesus had complete power and authority over the demons that possessed the man. But even with all of that power and authority Jesus did not have permission to stay in the region. Of course Jesus could have stayed and taught if he wanted to, but the people did not want this. This restored man, that everyone knew, he had permission to speak. He had permission to speak of the goodness of God. He had permission to speak about the mercy he had received through Jesus. What seems like a lesser and difficult mission is something that even Jesus was not able to do.

**Jesus delivers the man and saves his life . . .** The man now has complete and total freedom spiritually and physically. He is no longer an outcast. Jesus has removed all the barriers in his life. This man is truly saved in every sense of the word by Jesus. Jesus has restored him fully from the inside out.

But Jesus does not stop there. Jesus delivers the man and saves his life . . . **and gives him PURPOSE.**

We are often like the man in this story. **Sometimes God gives us a specific purpose, and we want nothing to do with that purpose.** We may sense that God is asking us to do a task, or pursue a career, or make a career change, or make a lifestyle change, or spend time with someone we would rather avoid. And we want nothing to do with the call that God is giving to us. We may be disobedient. We may be afraid. We may doubt ourselves.

But quite often the reason that we don't want to do what Jesus has asked of us is that it looks so unimpressive. Jesus asks of us to do something and it seems so meager. Or difficult. Or annoying. We want something bigger. We want something more noticeable. We want something more important. We want something fun. We want to get in the boat with Jesus and be part of his travelling mission team. We want to be part of the big show.

We have been told a lie over and over again that only big things are significant things. We've been told that important and impactful ministry happens when everyone knows your name.

We know Jesus calls us to be humble, but there's just something so appealing about being called to a great big task. And we feel embarrassed about being involved with ministry that is small. When a ministry is big, it is assumed to be credible. When it's small, it's assumed to be lame and suspect.

The man impacted by Jesus takes on something smaller. . . kind of. Instead of touring with Jesus he's staying home. But he finds the specific purpose Jesus gives him is the one he's uniquely equipped for.

We may not like what Jesus has asked for us to do. . . **yet we will find it's a purpose he has uniquely equipped us for.**

**Our purpose** as given by Jesus **is often:**

- **Smaller**
- **Less glamorous**
- **Hidden**
- **Undesired**
- **Awkward**

as compared to what we were hoping for.

Jesus purpose for us is all of those seemingly tiny, uncomfortable things. And yet those same things that Jesus has asked of us are more often:

- **Deeply impacting**
- **Enduring**

**What is something you need to take on?** Who does Jesus keep bringing to your attention over and over and over again? What does Jesus draw your attention to? What is a need that you can start doing something about? What is the one thing that needs to be done that you have been avoiding?

**What is something you need to release?** Do you have a set thing in your mind that you want, and you are begging and begging Jesus to let you have it? Do you have removable barriers that keep you from doing what you know you are being asked to do?

Where is Jesus telling you:

***“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”***