

Clothed & In His Right Mind Mark 5:1-20

“Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?”, the disciples ask (Mk. 4:41). It looks like Jesus left the crowd in Capernaum at evening to cross the sea and rest, but no such luck. After calming the sea he *immediately* encounters the untamable man. Mark five has been called the chapter of St. Jude, patron saint of lost causes. The Gerasene demoniac, the woman bleeding for twelve years, and Jairus’ dead daughter all experience the hope that is beyond hope, the transforming grace of the storm-stiller. This is the longest of Mark’s exorcisms, the most detailed among the gospels, and Jesus’ first venture into Gentile territory. We’ll consider the state of the man, the state of the demons, and the state of the witnesses. Mark teaches about Jesus, his mission, and his kingdom.

Unkosher vv1-5

The stormy sea typifies the chaos, defilement and death present in this man seen in four ways (Ps. 65:7-8; 89:9-10). First, he has an unclean spirit, which we learn is a legion of them (v2). “Unclean” has connotations of dirt and defilement. He is soul-filthy and occupied by potent darkness, doing bad because he was bad (Matt. 12:34; 7:16). Not all spirituality is good spirituality. We’ve moved from modern to postmodern. Modern people tended to be philosophically and religiously materialistic and skeptical if not dogmatically against all spirituality. Postmodern people tend to be spiritual and open all sorts of gods and spirits. Someone once said the best lie the devil ever told is that he doesn’t exist, which oddly works on both types of people. This man is culpably possessed; he is both perpetrator and victim. His life reflects his heart. Second, he lives among tombs, defiled by the dead (Num. 19:11-12). Third, Decapolis is Gentile and therefore unclean region. And fourth, it’s occupied by unclean pigs (Lev. 11:7). This guy has little or no human contact. He is dangerous, untamable like a wild animal, breaking chains with enormous strength, naked (Lk. 8:27), screaming and cutting himself, like a living zombie (vv3-5).

The Knowledge & Fate of Demons vv6-13

As soon as he sees Jesus, this unclean man of the Gentile world runs to and remarkably identifies him: “Jesus, Son of the Most High God” (v7). He knows that a time is coming for his torment (cf. Matt. 8:29), and he wants nothing to do with Jesus (v8). This enslaved man illustrates what slavery to sin looks like. Where he once had a choice, he is now controlled *and prefers it this way*. This is the state of the human race apart from God. We prefer the misery we know to the grace we don’t. Legion doesn’t want to leave or be disembodied, and Jesus grants his request to enter 2000 swine which then drown themselves in the sea (vv10-13).

Three Requests vv14-20

The demons recognize Jesus and beg him to remain in the region and go into the swine (vv10, 12). The community sees the man clothed and in his right mind, and knowing little of Jesus, begs him to leave (vv15-17). The restored man seems to know something of Jesus, having received grace, and begs to go with him (v18). He only denies the man he loves! Christians say “Thy will be done”, non Christians say “My will be done.” God “amens” both these prayers. Why does Jesus deny the demoniac? He wants him to go tell his friends how much *the Lord* did and showed mercy to him (v19). It was surely difficult, but he went to the cities of Decapolis in obedience and proclaimed what Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled (v20). Applying the parable of the soils (4:1-9), which is which? This was not an accidental foray into Gentile territory. Jesus is calming the seas, and the birds of the air are coming to next in his kingdom tree (Philadelphia among them). The demoniac teaches us about Jesus’ healing power, his love for the most evil people and darkest places, and his powerful kingdom taking root then and now. But in this story we should not just see what Jesus does for us in the moment, but what he would do. Jesus took on demons to free us from ours. He is the one who was stripped, deserted, despised, defiled and forsaken by God on the cross so we wouldn’t have to be.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 5:2-4, 11-13, 17-20

2 And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. 3 He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, 4 for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. . . . 11 Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, 12 and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." 13 So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea. 17 And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. 18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

Questions

1. Where does the man with the unclean spirit live? What does he do there?
2. When people see what Jesus did for the man, what do they ask him to do (verse 17)? Why do you think they want this?
3. What does Jesus tell the healed man to do (verse 19)?
4. Draw a picture of the healed man sitting clothed and in his right mind while the heard of 2000 pigs run into the sea.

Memory Verse:

And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. -Mark 5:20