

Virtues - Who a disciple is.  
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(Peaceful, grateful, compassionate)

Text: Mark 5:1-20

**5:1** They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup> When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. <sup>3</sup> This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, 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. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

<sup>6</sup> When he 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? Swear to God that you won’t torture me!” <sup>8</sup> For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you evil spirit!”

<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.

<sup>11</sup> A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. <sup>12</sup> The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” <sup>13</sup> He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

<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. <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. <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. <sup>17</sup> Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. <sup>19</sup> Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” <sup>20</sup> 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. [\[1\]](#)

## Sermon Notes

I need to warn you. This Bible lesson will sneak up on you. It snuck up on me. You are going to think it is about one thing. But before it's over, you will see it is about something else altogether.

You've been warned.

Last week we talked about how Discipleship is like a pool, and how beliefs, virtues, and practices are like floatation devices that give us the courage to jump in.

The first belief we focused upon was, "I am fully loved by God." God is love, the universe has been called into being as an expression of that love, we are invited by the Triune God into a divine dance of love, and nothing can separate us from that love (so says Romans 8:31 and following).

What happens when that love breaks into our lives? What kinds of changes – or rather, exchanges – take place.

When God's love works its healing and transforming power, old ways get exchanged for new ones. These new ways of being in the world are **Virtues**.

At the end of Mark 4, Jesus and his disciples are out on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is asleep in the back when a powerful squall comes up, threatening to swamp their boat. With a word, Jesus calms the wind and the waves.

So Mark has placed out-of-control situations next to one another: The first one is physical and on a grand scale (a wild sea). The second one spiritual/psychological and intimate (a wild person).

The man goes from being full of DEMONS to being full of PEACE, MERCY, and GRATITUDE.

Full of PEACE.

He goes from self-destructive and out of control to being calm, at peace.

All that horrible destructive force that drove the pigs over a cliff had been tormenting him. Afterwards he is fully clothed, and in his right mind.

Full of MERCY and compassion.

He begs the Jesus to let him join the group of disciples. But Jesus refuses! Instead Jesus says,

“Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.”

Go home to your **friends**! He has friends!? Maybe friends who gave up on him a long time ago. M

What might Jesus be trying to do for this man, in refusing to let him get in the boat and leave town? What might Jesus be doing for the town?

**God never wants us to suffer. But God never wastes our suffering either.**

Through our pain and healing, God reveals mercy and compassion everyone else.

Full of GRATITUDE.

The healed man: “And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

How much had Jesus done for him, really? Most of the time, others will never know how hard a battle we are fighting. They will never fully understand what Jesus has done for us. But in this case, the pigs tell the story. One of the great teachers of the church Jerome reflected on this story. In the year 390 he wrote:

It need not disturb anyone that by the Lord's command two thousand swine were slain by the agency of demons, since those who witnessed the miracle would not have believed that so great a multitude of demons had gone out of the man unless an equally vast number of swine had rushed to ruin, showing that it was a legion that impelled them. – Jerome, *The Life of St. Hilarion*

To suffer under the domination of 2000 demons? It's beyond imagining! And But notice the response of the local townspeople. They aren't grateful!

“Then people came to see what it was that had happened. 15 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. 16 Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. 17 Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood.”

It would be irresponsible of me not to point out that – for reasons that we will never fully understand – the community around this man was content to let him suffer. The most his community was willing to do was to put him in shackles and chains. The

community's responses boiled down to Homelessness or Incarceration. Does this sound familiar?

And instead of thanking Jesus, the community asks him to leave. The economic value of the pigs was more important to them than their friend's well being. When Jesus brings transformation to one person, it is an indictment against the community that had been looking the other way.

This is a story about healing. But it is also a story about justice.

Conclusion

Every time we come to a healing story in the gospels, we see this exchange take place.

Scholar and commentator Dale Bruner tells one of my favorite stories about this kind of transformation. He writes:

In reading a history of gospel songs I came across the story of an English miner who had been converted in the Wesleyan revival and whose life had been greatly changed. So greatly changed that some of his fellow workers chided him rather mercilessly at lunch time. One day they asked him in jest, "You don't really believe that Jesus changed water into wine, do you?" And the man replied... "I don't really know if Jesus actually changed water into wine; I wasn't there. But I do know one thing: In my house Jesus changed beer into furniture."

Dale Bruner, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* re: John 9:25

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