**Transformed from madman to missionary**

Text: Mark 5:1-20

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**Scriptures:** Ephesians 6:10-18; Isaiah 61:1-3; Mark 5:1-20

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 145, 419, 505, 399, 439, Facing a task unfinished

**Series:** The gospel of Mark (#13)

**Occasion:** Ordination of a deacon

**Theme:** After encountering a tormented demon-possessed man on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus commands the demons to leave and thereby restores the man, who then became a willing missionary to the Gentiles.

**Proposition:** Jesus powerfully transforms all those afflicted by evil who come to Him.

**Introduction**

Do you believe in demons? I hope that you do, because they are real, even though we cannot see them. The supernatural world exists just as surely as the natural one does. Asking if you believe in demons is really the same as asking if you believe in trees, rocks or spiders. They are real, whether or not you chose to believe that they are.

Demons are lesser beings in the kingdom of Satan. Demons are invisible agents of Satan, engaged in the spiritual war that has raged since the fall of our first ancestors Adam and Eve. This is a cosmic conflict that will not cease until Christ returns in glory at the end of this age.

We were reminded of this truth earlier from Ephesians 6:12 – “*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*”. Christ has already won the decisive victory against Satan at the cross, but the battle is not yet over – it is being fought all around us and also within us.

Many New Zealanders suffer from clinical depression and anxiety disorders. Drug and alcohol addiction is also increasingly prevalent in our society. In how many cases of poor mental health, psychological disorders and/or addictions is demon-possession also involved? The answer is that in some cases demons are likely to be at work. It is difficult for us to put any particular illness today into the category of definitely being due to an unclean spirit possessing a person. We need to be careful: neither to assume that mental illness is a consequence of demon possession, nor that such possession by evil spirits is merely a phenomenon of the past.

We should therefore expect that there is demon possession taking place in some individual people in the world today and that this will present as great suffering, torment and antisocial behaviour in the possessed. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to make a definite diagnosis in any particular situation because we do not have the specific insight that the Scriptures reveal in cases like the man who encountered Jesus in the country of the Gerasenes. I met with someone last week who told me about how the Lord had delivered him from addiction, psychosis (disconnection from reality) and what very much sounded like Satanic attack and demonic activity. I don’t hear testimonies like this every week, but over the years I have heard more than a few.

Demons exist and they do possess people. It has been suggested that there was much greater demonic activity at the time that the Kingdom of God approached with the public ministry of Christ. It makes sense that the increased opposition to Satan’s work with the coming of Jesus resulted in the Devil’s evil minions being more active than at other stages in history.

Last week we heard from Mark’s gospel how Jesus calmed a great windstorm that whipped up the waves on the Sea of Galilee by rebuking the wind and saying to sea “Peace! Be still!”. In this, Christ revealed His complete authority over the natural world. In our text today, which follows on from the Christ’s stilling of the storm, is His healing of a demon-possessed man. In this, Christ revealed His complete authority over the supernatural world. We are going to look at Mark’s account of a deeply troubled person that Jesus transformed from a madman to a missionary under three headings:

1. Jesus meets a terribly tormented man
2. Jesus completely conquers inner evil
3. Jesus creates a new missionary disciple
4. **Jesus meets a terribly tormented man**

The images on T.V. and the internet of the war in Ukraine are ugly, confronting and distressing. Battered buildings, broken bodies, blood-stained streets, bomb craters, missiles embedded in roads, burnt-out tanks, graves and huge loses for everyone involved in the carnage of this conflict. I limit my own exposure to these things, not because I don’t care about the suffering, but because constantly seeing all the brokenness can be so heart-breaking as to be paralysing.

When Jesus stepped off a boat on the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee, He was confronted with the images of war. Not from a distance, but ‘up front and personal’ on the ‘battlefield’. Just as the Ukrainians are outnumbered by the Russian forces, so the man who ran to meet Jesus was outnumbered by evil enemies. Everything about the images that Mark paints with the words of his gospel account is horrific. The afflicted man who came to Jesus was a homeless outcast. He was separated from anyone who might once have cared about him. He lived among the tombs (5:3). This place of the dead was ceremonially unclean to the Jews. He was unclothed (Luke 8:27; Mark 5:15); naked and exposed.

He was so tormented that he cried out night and day (v5). His internal pain was so great that inflicting external injury provided him with an awful distraction. He cut himself with stones (v5), just as people who struggle with intense internal pain today may cut themselves, take drugs or drink themselves into a stupor just to try to cope with their trauma. This man possessed super-human strength so that even though he had previously been restrained with shackles and chains, he had broken them (v3). The fact that he could not be controlled may account for him having been effectively banished to a remote graveyard.

This suffering man thought that Jesus had come as yet another enemy to torment him (v7). As we’ve already seen, Mark’s is the shortest gospel, yet his account of this tormented man is the longer {440 words} than that of Matthew (8:28-9:1 {186 words}) or Luke (8:26-40{406 words}). Mark wants us to know in detail how horrific this man’s life had become. The reason for his desperate condition was that he had ‘an unclean spirit’.

In Scripture, this is another way of saying that he was demon-possessed. All unclean, evil, spirits mentioned in Scripture are demons who oppose God. Unclean spirits can possess people, causing them sickness and harm. Evil spirits promote wickedness in human beings, spiritually polluting a person’s thoughts and actions. The symptoms of demon-possession are virtually indistinguishable from many physical illnesses and conditions of the body that we are familiar with today. These include an inability to speak (e.g. Matt 9:32-33, Luke 11:14), blindness (e.g. Matt 12:22-23), and seizures (Mark 9:14-29) and insanity (Mark 5:1-20).

In the case of this man, he was possessed by many demons (v9). The symptom of this evil occupation within the man was a severe affliction of mind that today we would likely describe as a psychological or psychiatric disorder. It is clear from the gospel accounts that Jesus, anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1-2), was able to discern the difference between afflictions that were a result of the fallen state of this creation from those that were the direct result of demonic activity. The unseen spiritual realm is an abiding reality in this world in which the ‘spiritual forces of evil’ wrestle with people like us as they serve Satan’s schemes (Eph 6:12).

Jesus met a man in great need who was terribly tormented. Christ didn’t turn away and get back in the boat – he had pity on a weak and needy person. This is what deacons are charged to do - to ‘*help the needy and afflicted, and have pity on the weak*’. The work of a deacon ‘*ought to be governed by a spirit of compassion and kindness, love and cheerfulness*’. As we serve the Lord, seeking His Kingdom, we wrestle in the spiritual battlefield against Satan’s forces of evil. It is not easy work for deacons, for elders or for any of us, but we follow Jesus in our service brothers and sisters, because we know that He, and He alone completely heals the brokenness of this world as he conquers the evil that lies within – which brings us to our second point.

1. **Jesus completely conquers inner evil**

My dog Ruth is an excitable but gentle creature. When she meets another dog she usually just rolls on her back. This is notthe best posture to show dominance if the other animal is seeking to ‘gain the upper paw’. Pinning the other dog down is the usual way to exert authority if you are a canine. Similarly in a wrestling match between humans, the main objective is the same: tackle your opponent so that you can pin their shoulders down on the mat.

In ancient times, it was believed that mastery over an enemy could be gained by accurately identifying them and speaking their name aloud. It is likely that this is what the demon-possessed man attempted to do by asking “*What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God*” (v7). This instant and accurate identification of Jesus as being divine is striking. In contrast, it was only after the extraordinarily powerful miracle of Jesus in calming a ferocious storm by rebuking the wind and speaking to the sea, that the disciples began to see something of who Jesus really is.

The demon-possessed man may have been attempting to overthrow Jesus, yet he seems to know that he lacks the power to do so. Notice that he had fallen down before Christ (v6) and that he expected to be punished. His use of a divine name for Jesus was a defensive strategy for him in the face of a far stronger opponent. Strangely, and ironically, he invokes the protection of God saying: “*I adjure you by God, do not torment me*” (v7).

Then Jesus, asks the man’s name. Putting this back in wrestling terms, Jesus is clearly demonstrating that He is the one with the authority and power. The man replies “*My name is Legion, for we are many*” (v9). In fact it is not really the man himself speaking here, his identity has been displaced by evil forces.

As you may know, a legion was a large unit in the Roman army comprising 6000 foot-soldiers, 120 horsemen and other support personnel. The purpose of the word ‘legion’ here does not seem to be to convey a military meaning, nor a mathematically accurate count of the number of demons. The name ‘Legion’ simply reveals that there were many evil, unclean spirits inhabiting the man and making his life utterly miserable.

Today we are familiar with the term ‘superhero’ – used to describe a comic book cartoon character with superpowers that ordinary people do not possess. The Bible doesn’t use the term ‘superhero’, although Samson in the Old Testament certainly fits the description. One day, finding the fresh jawbone of a donkey, he struck down 1,000 enemy Philistines (Judges 15:15). We could accurately say that, so much more than Samson, Jesus fully qualifies for the title ‘Superhero’ – although the Bible uses different, and much more reverent, language ‘*King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*’ (Rev 19:16).

The deranged man who fell down before Jesus had superhuman strength; being possessed by a large multitude of evil spirits, yet this legion of demons pleaded for mercy before Jesus, begging Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. They knew that Jesus was far stronger than all of them were combined. They begged Jesus, saying “*send us into the pigs, let us enter them*’ (v12). It is like Jesus pinning an entire evil army down on a wrestling mat with His superior strength and all those under His vice-like grip crying out in their whimpering submission ‘please don’t hurt us’. How often the bully, the aggressor, proves to be a coward when ‘the tables are turned’. No mercy is shown by them, but they plead for it when they are challenged by a stronger force.

Mark then records what happened to the demon-possessed swine. “*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 were drowned in the sea*” (v13). An obvious question that jumps out at us from Mark’s account is ‘*why did Jesus allow the demons to enter the pigs*’? Although Scripture does not explicitly answer this, there are likely two reasons:

1. The time of Christ’s ultimate conquest of all demons had not yet come (Rev 19:20). Therefore Jesus allowed the demons to continue their destructive work, but not upon a person.
2. The drowning of the demon-possessed pigs in the Sea of Galilee showed that the real purpose of the demons was the destruction of the man.

The result of Christ’s ‘*wrestling with the spiritual forces of evil*’ (to use the language of Ephesians 6:12) was a complete conquest of all the many demons who had terrorised the man, causing him great distress, isolation from others, and binding him in captivity in a way that no physical shackles or chains could do. These demons caused the man to do things to himself that no right-minded person would do. He was possessed by an inner evil.

Demon-possession is **not** the same thing as having a sinful nature, but both can be accurately described as an ‘inner evil’. The Apostle Paul speaks of his sinful nature this way in Romans 7: “*I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate*” (v15). “*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing*” (v18-19).

Can you identify with the torment of wrestling with competing desires within your own heart? It can be terrifying. When we are led by our old sinful nature, we align ourselves with evil forces and act in ways that our contrary to our desire in Christ to ‘put on the new self’. Now let’s go back to transformed man as we see that Jesus creates a new missionary disciple.

1. **Jesus creates a new missionary disciple**

The drowned pigs dramatically demonstrate the ‘end-game’ for Satan’s war: death. The Devil’s aim is to utterly destroy the image of God in man. The total transformation of the tormented demon-possessed man dramatically demonstrates the ‘end-game’ of the Kingdom of God: restoration, peace and abundant life – the restored image of God in man.

The herdsmen who had been tending the pigs went to tell others ‘*in the city and in the country*’ what had happened. The loss of so much livestock would have been big news, but the exorcism of the demons from the man and their entry into the pigs was so extraordinary that many people came to see for themselves. They didn’t come to look at the dead carcasses of pigs floating on the Sea of Galilee, they came see Jesus and the evidence of His transforming power in the person of a man whose life had been so very broken. Mark records: “*And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid*” (v15). ‘Afraid’ here in Greek is the same word for fear that Mark used to describe the reaction of the disciples when Jesus stilled the storm (4:41).

Here Jesus had not stilled the violence of a great windstorm on a lake, He had stilled the violence of the evil afflicting a man. He had fulfilled the Old Testament prophesy of the Messiah who would ‘*bind up the broken-hearted*’, ‘*proclaim liberty to the captives*’, ‘*open the prison to those who are bound*’, ‘*proclaim the Lord’s favour*’ and ‘*give a garment of praise instead of a faint spirit*’ (from Isaiah 61:1-3).

Now the man who had been bound, not with chains, but by Satan’s evil forces, was completely transformed, sitting clothed and ‘in his right mind’. He was the same person, but dramatically different. Like Zacchaeus, who had been a wealthy, greedy the tax-collector who was once lost, but then was found (Luke 19:10). Like the Apostle Paul, who had been a murderous hunter of Christians before he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and became a minister of the gospel (Acts 9).

Those who had seen or heard what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs ‘*began to beg Jesus to depart from their region*’ (5:17). It seems that they were more concerned about the economic effect of having Jesus around than the compassionate restoration of an afflicted, tormented human being. An example of ‘profits before people’ perhaps?

In contrast, the healed man, begged Jesus ‘*that he might be with him*’ (v18). Jesus had other plans for the man and 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*.*"* (Mark 5:19). He became the first missionary to the Gentiles, going away and proclaiming in the Decapolis (a region with ten cities) how much Jesus had done for him. The result was that ‘everyone marvelled’ at the work of Christ. On the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus demonstrated His supreme power and authority over spiritual forces of evil.

Where do you fit into this story, having seen the power and authority of Jesus over the spiritual forces of evil? These forces are active in their opposition against all of us. Have you come to Christ Jesus in faith as yet? Do you trust that He has overcome Satan, the Evil One, on the cross by dying in your place? Do you continue to wrestle with the sinful nature that yet remains within you, doing so in the strength of Christ alone?

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, God reminds us that we ‘*are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in {us} is greater than he who is in the world*’ (1 John 4:4). Jesus transforms the lives of all kinds of people, like you, like me, like the terribly tormented madman, so that we too can tell others how much the Lord has done for us. You can speak of how He has changed you and is still changing you. You can speak personally of His mercy upon you and His grace towards you.

This is what the man who Jesus had transformed did and ‘*everyone marvelled*’. God was glorified. Each of us, brothers and sisters, has a story to tell of Christ’s work in our lives. Each of us are called to be missionaries to those we live with and around. We have a gospel to proclaim, the good news of God’s transforming grace.

AMEN.