

Mark 5:1-20

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. ² And when [Jesus] had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an **UNCLEAN SPIRIT** met him. ³ He *lived among the tombs*; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; ⁴ 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. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. ⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; ⁷ 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." ⁸ For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" ⁹ Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is **Legion**; for we are many." ¹⁰ He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹ Now there on the hillside a great *herd of swine* was feeding; ¹² and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." ¹³ 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 sea, and were drowned in the sea.*

¹⁴ 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. 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. ¹⁸ As he was getting

The gospel of Mark is thought of as the oldest of the four. It tells how Jesus is the good news of God, come near to proclaim the kingdom in language that is direct and concise, inviting a response in the part of the reader for the time to decide & act is now (1:15).

the other side of the sea:: Mark is actually talking about a Lake (Galilee). The Israelites, who were land-dwellers not ocean-traders like the Romans, Greeks or Philistines, called it a sea. Mark takes the time to indicate that this is happen on the far side of the Lake, in Gentile land known as the "ten cities" (*Decapolis* in Greek). It was the limit of the land controlled by the Roman Empire, and thus militarily occupied by the Roman Legions.

UNCLEAN SPIRIT:: while we often think immediately of demon possession. Many historians point out that in the ancient world folks with mental illnesses such as epilepsy or various mental illnesses were thought of as possessed by foreign spirits. Curiously the literal wording means an "unclean, unhealthy or un-natural spirit/breath. The creation story of Genesis talks of human life springing from the gift of God's breath (or spirit – remember it's the same word!) within us. So an Unclean Spirit is literally life that is the opposite of what God intended and created.

lived among the tombs | herd of swine:: these elements symbolize impurity to the Jewish cultural code. Tombs were the sojourn of the dead (cadavers were unclean or impure). Pigs were also unkosher, impure or ritually unclean; implying a separation or cutting off from the presence and purpose of God. These two impure items are events connected in Isaiah 65:4:

² I held out my hands all day long

to a rebellious people,

who walk in a way that is not good,
following their own devices;

³ a people who provoke me

to my face continually,

sacrificing in gardens

and offering incense on bricks;

⁴ who sit inside tombs,

and spend the night in secret places;

who eat swine's flesh,

with broth of abominable things in their vessels;"

Legion:: this is a Latin word mixed into the story, which for Mark's social world meant a division of Roman soldiers. It's not just a signifier of "a lot" but also of a military or violent presence.

The power of names: in the ancient world it was thought that knowing and pronouncing another's name gave power over that person. It's similar to how we assume that pronouncing a person's full name makes them sit- up and listen in a special way.

into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. ¹⁹ 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.” ²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- **What grabs your attention in this reading?**
- **What does Jesus do for the man living among the tombs?**
- **How is God actively present in Jesus? How have you experienced the deliverance of God – as this man did – through an encounter with Jesus?**
- **What do you think the man did next? How are you invited to “go home and tell your friends of what the Lord has done for you”?**

Jesus:: we often forget that the name Jesus is a derivative of the name Joshua which means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh rescues” – exactly what happens in this story.

JESUS, SON OF THE MOST HIGH GOD:: this is a Hellenistic or Gentile-flavored title which only appears once in Mark, and otherwise is Hebrews 7:1 and throughout Luke (a gospel written for a Gentile audience).

rushed and were drowned in the sea.

:: these enemies soldiers are drowned in hostile waters like the chariots and army of Pharaoh pursuing the Moses and the people of God in Exodus 14-15.

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into the boat:: getting into the boat with Jesus was an early symbol of being part of the “Church” or Jesus-following community. Here Jesus tells the man – who seemingly wants a different start to **Go home** - effectively sending him out as the first missionary – to bear witness to the way in which Yahweh had rescued and delivered him through Jesus.

This is the second of only two exorcisms in Mark’s gospel in which Jesus speaks to an unclean spirit. The first is the first such episode in the gospel, coming just after Jesus embarks upon his ministry, described in military terms - the word gospel, meaning “good news” was the word given after a victorious battle. This first exorcism is recounted in Mark 1.

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

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²¹ [Jesus and the disciples] went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²² They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ Just then there was in their synagogue **A MAN WITH AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT**, ²⁴ and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷ They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” ²⁸ At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

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³² That evening, at sunset, the [people of the region] brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴ And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and **CAST OUT MANY DEMONS**; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.