



WESTLAKE HILLS

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“When Good Confronts Evil”

Sermon Series: “The Way of Jesus”

Mark 5:1-20

By: Dr. Mark Roberts, Guest Preacher

January 24, 2010

Introduction to the Scripture Reading

Our Scripture text today is Mark 5:1-20 as we continue to study the Gospel of Mark, investigating “The Way of Jesus.” Last week, your pastor, Dr. Peter Barnes, focused on Jesus’ stilling of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Today we take the next step forward in Mark as Jesus and his disciples get to the other side of the sea, where they confront evil in a most unsettling form.

Listen now to God’s Word from Mark 5:1-20.

Scripture Reading

Mark 5:1 They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. 3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. 4 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. 5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7 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!” 8 For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you evil spirit!”

9 Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

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

11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. 12 The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” 13 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.

14 Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. 15 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. 16 Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man — and told about the pigs as well. 17 Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.



18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 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." 20 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.

This is the Word of the Lord!

Personal Introduction

First of all, I want to thank you for the honor of being your preacher this morning. I appreciate the invitation and the chance to share with you in worship today.

I also want to thank you for the long relationship that you folks have had with Laity Lodge. We are deeply committed to renewal in churches, and have been glad to partner with Westlake Hills for many years.

I am excited to see what God is doing in your church. Along with you, I've been glad to welcome your new pastor, Peter Barnes, to Texas. Now I must confess to you that my first experience with Peter was *not* all that positive. We met at a pastors' retreat in Minnesota about 15 years ago. During free time one afternoon, we played some basketball together. For a while, I was responsible for guarding Peter. Never, let me say it again, *never* volunteer to guard Peter Barnes. He proceeded to "clean my clock," as they say. It was embarrassing. So I didn't begin with the warmest feelings for Peter. It's a male ego thing, you understand.

But, when he moved to Texas, Peter joined a covenant group of Presbyterian pastors of which I am also a member. In this last year I've gotten to know Peter on a much deeper level, and that has been a delight. In spite of his ability to devastate his opponents on the basketball court, Peter is a bright, thoughtful, passionate, prayerful man, a person of deep integrity. I am thrilled that God called him to Texas to be your pastor. I just won't guard him on the court ever again!

Jesus Encounters a Demonized Man

You know, Peter on the basketball court is a little like the man we meet in the first verses of Mark 5. No, no, I'm not suggesting your pastor has a legion of demons. But, like Peter, the man in Mark 5 was very hard to guard! Even when his neighbors chained him up, he broke free and "no one was strong enough to subdue him" (5:4). This poor soul lived among the tombs, more at home with the dead than the living. He would repeatedly cry out and hurt himself. This was a profoundly broken man, one who was terrorized by the demons that were destroying his life.

When the demonized man saw Jesus, "he ran and fell on his knees before Jesus" (v. 6). Then, like other people with demons in the Gospels, the evil within him spoke to Jesus with knowledge of his true identity: "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" (v. 7). This verse reminds us that faith in Jesus is not just understanding and acknowledging the



facts about who he is. Demons did that just fine. Rather, true faith in Jesus is trusting yourself completely to him, allowing him to save you and be the sovereign of your life. Faith is knowing who Jesus is and putting your life in his strong, loving, nail-scarred hands.

Verse 8 adds an unsettling observation: “For Jesus has said to him, ‘Come out of this man, you evil spirit!’” We’re accustomed to seeing Jesus cast out demons with a mere word. He says “Go” and they flee. But here, when Jesus had said, “Come out of him,” the evil presence decided to put up a fight.

Thus began a most perplexing interaction between Jesus and *the demons* – as it turns out, there were many – living inside of the man. At first, Jesus asked, “What is your name?” (v. 9). The demons said, “My name is Legion . . . for we are many” (v. 9). Then they begged Jesus repeatedly not to send them away. The Greek original of this verse makes it clear that they were begging Jesus many times. And he let it all happen.

Finally, the demons asked Jesus to send them into a nearby herd of pigs (v. 12). Inexplicably, Jesus agreed to this request, and the demons promptly entered the pigs, which promptly rushed down the steep bank into the Sea of Galilee and died (v. 13). Two thousand dead pigs destroyed! The whole herd gone!

What We Learn About Good and Evil from This Encounter

You’ve got to admit this is a strange passage. Many of our questions about the text cannot be answered from the text itself, like: Why did the demons remain in the man even after Jesus’ commanded them to leave? And, why did Jesus allow them to enter the herd of pigs? And, did Jesus know what would happen with the pigs once the demons possessed them? And, if so, why did he allow a family’s livelihood to be destroyed?

I don’t believe Mark gives us answers to these questions, though you can find plenty of preachers and commentators who will try to offer them. In my opinion, we’re better off sticking with what is clear in the text of Scripture. And there are a couple of clear points that seem to me beyond question and worthy of our attention.

First, we learn from this story that evil is not instantly vanquished by the presence and power of good. When Jesus came on the scene, the demons put up a fight. They lost in the end, and that’s the good news. But their defeat wasn’t instantaneous, and that’s not the good news.

This story, I believe, serves as a parable for our own encounter with evil, whether in the world, in institutions, in other people, or in ourselves. Even with God on our side, even with God at work in and through us, evil puts up a fight. Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, we can be 100% sure of the ultimate outcome. God *will* win. Good *will* triumph over evil. Hallelujah! But that hasn’t fully happened yet. The battle is still going on, and we’re in the midst of it, each and every day.



Moreover, we're not just in the midst of the battle between good and evil. We are engaged in a fight. We have been drafted into the army of God. With the truth and love of Jesus Christ, imitating his self-giving servanthood, we are to fight the good fight with all of its associated joys and sorrows. Whether we're struggling with sin in our own lives, or whether we're sharing Christ with those who don't know him, or whether we're seeking to overcome injustice in our world, we fight on the Lord's side in the battle between good and evil. And, as the story in Mark 5 reminds us, sometimes this can be a tough and prolonged fight.

The Value of Human Wholeness

Second, from the encounter of Jesus with the demonized man, we learn just how much Jesus values human wholeness. Assuming that Jesus knew that the herd of pigs would be in bad shape once they were filled with a legion of demons, then we can only conclude that Jesus considered it far more important for the man to be set free than for the pigs to survive. The value of the wholeness of one person outweighs the lives of two thousand animals. It matters more even than the financial security of the owners of the herd.

My friends, we tend to think of Jesus as caring a great deal about our eternal destiny, and indeed he does. We rightly understand that he was willing to sacrifice, not just two thousand pigs, but even his own life for the sake of our salvation. That is wonderful, indeed.

But it's not the whole story. The Son of God was born, lived, preached, healed the sick, cast out demons, was crucified, and was raised from the dead, not just to guarantee your life after death. Rather, he came and sacrificed so that you might begin to experience life in all of its fullness now. Jesus wants you to be whole, not just someday after you die, but now. He wants you to be free from the wounds that distress you and the chains that bind you, not just after death, but also in this earthly life.

I expect that most of us here today are not literally indwelt by a legion of demons, thanks be to God. But we all have our "demons," if you will. We all struggle with wounds that continue to tear us, with sins that pummel our souls, with destructive habits that bind us, with fears that torment us, or with so many other ailments that make us less than whole. Jesus wants to heal us, to free us, to empower us, and to give us new lives *now*, even as we wait for the fullness of new life that is still to come.

Sisters and brothers, Mark 5 reminds us that your wholeness matters profoundly to Jesus. That's why he came. That's why he died. That's why he was raised on the third day. The story in Mark 5 foreshadows this reality in a striking way.

An Example of New Life in Christ

I don't personally know anyone who experienced deliverance exactly like that which we see in Mark 5. But I do know a man whose experience came pretty close.



Jim grew up in a broken family and carried that brokenness in his own soul. When he was a young man starting out in his career, he began to abuse alcohol. Soon he lost his job, his friends, his home, and his health. He became, quite literally, a homeless person on Skid Row in Los Angeles, sleeping in the streets and alleys. Jim was a devastated man with no hope.

One evening, while desperate for food and, of course, another drink, he saw a sign for a free meal being served in a downtown rescue mission. Jim had no desire for God, but was hungry enough to wander inside that mission. There, as he ate soup and bread, he tried to ignore the preacher. But something clicked inside of Jim. As he heard about God's love and mercy, as he heard that Jesus had died for him, Jim's heart was strangely moved. Before long, Jim came forward to receive Jesus as his Savior.

In that moment Jim's eternal destiny was decided once and for all. But that wasn't all that happened when Jim met Jesus. In that humble rescue mission, the Lord began to set Jim free and rebuild his life. It was as if Jesus had cast legion out of Jim's soul and gave him a fresh start. His restoration took time and plenty of effort, both divine and human. But Jim did indeed find wholeness in Jesus. So, by the time I got to know Jim, many years after his conversion, he was one of the kindest and godliest men I knew. He passionately loved the Lord who had set him free and served him in every aspect of his life. He was, in fact, a highly respect elder at Hollywood Presbyterian Church, where I served as an associate pastor. If you had met him, you would never have guessed where he had been in his life.

Conclusion

My friends, I don't know what you're battling today. I expect that many of us find ourselves in a raging battle between good and evil. Perhaps some of us feel as if we're at the brink of destruction. We may look great on the outside, but inside we're being eaten alive by our suffering or our sin. Our marriages may be crumbling or our family relationships on the verge of being shattered. Our hidden lives of addiction are tearing us apart. Or perhaps we find ourselves slaves to gossip, or unforgiveness, or anger, or . . . you can name your own "demons."

One of my "demons" these days is fear, fear associated with my children. I have two teenage kids, and they're great human beings. They're doing well in just about every way. Yet I can feel afraid because of them. I feel fear when they drive in cars with their friends, even when I know their friends and trust them. I just don't like my kids out on the roads at night. But I also know I can't keep them locked inside forever.

I also can feel fear when I think of their future. My son just took his SAT yesterday. I expect he did very well. But I can still worry about where he'll go to college. And I can worry about how we're going to afford it. And I can worry about how I'll do without him around. And so on and so on. I expect many of you can relate to these fears, either because you've been there before or because you're there right now.



I need to take my “demon” of fear to Jesus, because he can deal with it. He can handle crisis, any challenge, any obstacle, any bondage in your life.

My friends, the battle you and I experience is real. And though God will ultimately prevail, you’re in the midst of a real struggle. But there is good news, great news for you:

- Good will prevail over evil. God will win. Evil will be fully and finally defeated.
- Jesus wants you to be whole. He came to set you free, not just in the long run, but now.
- Jesus is passionate about your wholeness. It cost him, not merely a herd of pigs, but his own life, which he freely gave for your sake and mine. Jesus came and died to give you life in all abundance.

So I would urge you, sisters and brothers, to turn to Jesus today. It doesn’t matter if you’ve been a Christian for 46 years, as I have been, or if you’re still checking out Christian faith. We all need Jesus: his love, his mercy, his grace, his power. We all need more freedom from the chains that bind us. We all need to experience more of the wholeness Jesus came to give.

The same Jesus who set the demonized man free from the legion of his tormentors is here today. He is here to set you free. At this table, we remember his sacrifice and its implications. At this table, we come to experience his forgiveness, mercy, and healing.

So as you approach the table today, come trusting Jesus. Come, offering yourself to him in all of your brokenness. Come, ready to receive his grace and mercy. Come, asking him for freedom. Come, and be set free!

Amen.

