

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(July 3, 2011)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: BREATHLESS

(studies in the Gospel of Mark)

Calming Storms at Sea, in Souls

(Mark 5:1-20)

Study #8

Introduction: Shifted paradigm...

New family units are being formed left and right, all around us these days. And it's a lot of fun to watch. In recent months we have been blessed to enjoy quite a few weddings among members and friends at Northwest - and there are more on the horizon.

Of course, wedding planning is hectic. The day of the wedding is exhausting. Honeymoons are delightful. And marriage is rich.

But, more than anything, marriage changes everything. It is supposed to change everything.

In what has been for several years one of my favorite books on marriage, The Mystery of Marriage, author Mike Mason writes, "A marriage, or a marriage partner, may be compared to a great tree growing right up through the center of one's living room. It is just *there*, and it is huge, and everything has been built around it, and wherever one happens to be going—to the fridge, to bed, to the bathroom, or out the front door—the tree has to be taken into account. It cannot be gone through; it must respectfully be gone around. It is somehow bigger and stronger than oneself. True, it could be chopped down, but not without tearing the house apart. And certainly it is beautiful, unique, exotic; but also, let's face it, it is at times an enormous inconvenience."

Marriage changes everything. Fiercely individualistic individuals who have been thinking individually are now called to think as a couple. Life plans are no longer made independently, but together.

Marriage is a paradigm shift.

Paradigm shifts may be prompted by marriage, scientific discoveries, reversals in fortune (up or down) or by any of a number of other factors.

But when we find our worlds rocked, when we find that the way we look at the world has dramatically changed, we have experienced what has come to be called a "paradigm shift."

One day, as Jesus' disciples' were with Him sailing across the Sea of Galilee, their personal paradigms got shifted.

After telling some parables, Jesus dismissed the great crowds, turned to His disciples and said, *[4:35] "Let us go over to the other side."*

And with that, they launched out on the Sea of Galilee, sailing from the northwest side of the lake to the southeast shore.

That line of travel took them from the region of Galilee, a Jewish inhabited area, to a land known as the Decapolis, a place largely inhabited by Gentiles.

While on this sailing trip, a storm blew up.

Stilling a Storm on the Sea (4:35-41)

A Storm Arose on the Sea! (v. 37)

[37] And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up.

It is not unusual for fierce storms to suddenly descend on the Sea of Galilee. The storms can sweep down from any of the hills that surround the lake and turn a placid lake into a tempest. This storm was quite a tempest.

Jesus Sleeps (v. 38b)

[38a] Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion

There is a picture of either total exhaustion or total peace of mind - sleeping during a violent storm on the sea!

But if Jesus was asleep, the disciples were definitely NOT asleep. While they had been battling sea-storms for years, this one was more than they could handle.

Disciples Panic! (vv. 38b)

[38b]...they woke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”

Now, remember. These are sea-hardened fishermen who have worked this body of water all their lives. And they are crying out for help in the middle of a sea-squall to a land-lubbing carpenter from Nazareth. It turns out that their cries for help to Jesus were well placed.

Jesus Speaks (vv. 39-40)

To the sea (v. 39)

[39] And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.

As soon as the sea heard the voice of her Master and Maker she calmed down, submitted to Him, and became like glass.

Then, Jesus turned to His twelve disciples and had words for them.

To the disciples (v. 40)

[40] And He said to them, “Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?”

All of a sudden their worlds changed. Their paradigms shifted. They saw what they had not seen before.

Paradigm Shifted (v. 41)

[41] They became very much afraid and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

These twelve grown men were afraid because they were beginning to get the idea that Jesus was more than a man of God, more than a prophet, and more than a good, moral teacher.

Someone who could still a raging storm on the sea is wholly other than what/who they had thought they were dealing with. They knew He was a miracle-worker. They knew He was a great teacher. Now they have come to see that He is sovereign over nature, God incarnate.

This new discovery on the Sea of Galilee was a game changer. Jesus has blown apart the boxes in which they had placed Him. And if they thought that stilling a raging sea was impressive, they will be even more impressed when He turns His attention to a raging soul.

With calmed waters outside and jittery disciples inside, the boat landed on the southeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us that they have landed in the region of the Gerasenes, probably near a town called Gersa.¹

Immediately, our attention focuses on a man who lived in the area.

II. Stilling a Storm in a Soul (5:1-20)

A. On Foreign Soil (vv. 1-2)

[1] They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. [2] When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him

It is not unusual for the Bible to deal with people who are possessed and tormented by demons.

¹ It seems best to understand the location being a town called Gersa, located on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus dealt with people who were oppressed by the devil on a number of occasions.

- He cast a demon out of a man in a synagogue (Mark 1:23-28);
- He healed many who were demon-possessed on the same night He healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Mark 1:32);
- He gave His disciples authority to cast out demons (Mark 3:15).

And there were other times, too, when Jesus confronted the devil, such as when He Himself was tempted in the wilderness (Mark 1:13).

From beginning to end, the Bible assumes the existence of a real, personal devil and real, personal demons as much as it assumes the existence of God, angels, and the afterlife.

It is not true that the Bible attributes all illnesses to demon possession. Sometimes it does and sometimes it does not. Sometimes, insanity is attributed to demons and sometimes it is not.

But in this case, there is no question. The pitiful man who approached Jesus was possessed by demons. And he had evidently been possessed for a very long time.

How he came to be this condition is anybody's guess. Was he involved in some gross sin which opened the way for demonic activity? Was he deeply involved in the occult practices of the region? Was he simply the hapless victim of evil spirits?

We are not told.

Nor does Jesus seem especially interested in finding out. As we work our way through the narrative, Jesus doesn't ask about his personal habits, his past lifestyle choices, or his family of origin.

When we are brought into this story, we meet a man who lives in a way no one would choose and is ruled by a will not his own.

As Jesus gets out of the boat He sees a human mess, a stark created-in-the-image-of-God tragedy standing right in front of Him.

He was a citizen of the closest city (Gersa), but didn't live in the city in one of the houses there. This man lived among the tombs that were built into the cliffs in that region. There was an animal wildness about him. Everything about him reeked of uncleanness.

A Power Encounter

The demons' cruelty (vv. 3-5)

[3] and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; [4] because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. [5] Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones.

The demon-possessed man was afflicted with terrible physical strength. At times, neighbors and fellow citizens had tied him up with chains. Every time, supernatural strength would course through his body and he would break the chains.²

He was self-destructive, gashing himself with stones.

Now, the man (who remains nameless throughout) has become too wild. No one approaches him anymore, and he is left alone to roam among the tombs and out in the deserted areas like a wild beast.

You'll note that Jesus didn't go searching for him. He approached Jesus. Using the vocal chords of the man, the demon spoke.

The demons' fear (vv. 7-8)

[6] Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; [7] and shouting with a loud voice, he said, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!"

² Immense physical strength is a phenomenon that is mentioned frequently in the literature that addresses demon possession.

The speaking demon was obviously very frightened. It recognized who it was dealing with. It knew Jesus to be the Son of God.³ And, using the body of the possessed man, it fell down in front of Jesus, begging Him for leniency. (Of course, the demon had been tormenting this man for years, but begs Jesus to **not** be tormented.)

Mark brings us into the on-going action in this scene. Jesus had been commanding the spirit to leave the man. *[8] For He had been saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”*) But this demon horde was stubborn.

So, Jesus demanded an answer to a question from the demon He never does ask of the man.

The demons are cast out with a word!

The demons identified (v. 9)

[9] And He was asking him, “What is your name?” And he said to Him, “My name is Legion; for we are many.”

When Jesus directed the demon to give his name⁴, the speaking demon responded with “Legion” because there were actually many, many demons afflicting this man.

The number of soldiers in a Roman legion varied, so we can’t give a firm number to this man’s demons. Generally, a legion consisted of from five to six thousand soldiers. So, it may be that this man was host to multiple thousands of demons.

Like a Roman military unit, the demons formed a unit that was cruel, destructive, and strong.

But, the demons have met their match in Jesus, and they know it. They beg Jesus for a reprieve from destruction.

³ Isn’t it interesting that the disciples on the boat wondered, “Who is this Guy?” while the demon immediately knew Who it was dealing with!

⁴ Trench suggests that Jesus was asking the man his name, not the demon. But, this is unlikely, it seems.

The demons beg (v. 10)

[10] And he began to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country.

For reasons not made clear here, Jesus agreed to their request and allowed them to continue to do their dirty work in the same region.

Jesus sets the man free - that is the point (vv. 11-13)

Nearby there was a grazing herd of swine - a big herd! And the unclean demons requested permission to leave the man and enter the unclean pigs (“Unclean” from the perspective of a Jew. Moses’ Law listed pigs among the animals that the Jews were not allowed to eat.). Jesus gave them permission, and the rest makes for very interesting reading.

[11] Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain.⁵ [12] The demons implored Him, saying, “Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.” [13] Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea.

News of what had happened spread quickly.

Good Riddance to Jesus! (14-17)

Good News! (vv. 14-15)

[14] Their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and in the country. And the people came to see what it was that had happened.

What would have greeted the eyes of the citizens of the city of Gersa when they arrived on the scene?

⁵ The fact that the swine were present clues us in to the fact that this land was mostly Gentile-ish, since pigs are considered unclean animals by the Jews.

Well, they would have first gazed out at the south end of the Sea of Galilee and a bay of pigs (sorry...) - a couple thousand dead pigs floating in the water!

Then, they would have looked away from the sea to where Jesus was and would have been greeted by another sight entirely.

[15a] They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the “legion”

The demoniac who had been ravaging the countryside for years, making passage through the area unsafe for humans, screaming at the top of his lungs as he ran naked through the tombs, is now sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind.

And it is when they see THIS that the Bible tells us, ***[15b] and they became frightened.***

Not only was it obvious to the folks who had come out to the scene that the demons had entered the swine. It was clear that the demons had left the man.

Now, instead of restless, he is seated calmly; instead of naked, he is fully clothed; instead of raging, he is in his right mind; instead of shunning human company he is calmly seated by Jesus.⁶

How great is this. This is fantastic!

But the people who had come to see didn't see it that way. They saw the good news of this man's deliverance as bad news.

Bad News? (vv. 16-17)

[16] Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine. [17] And they began to implore Him [i.e. - Jesus] to leave their region.

⁶ This is significant. We are to understand that he is listening to what Jesus had to say. He has adopted the posture of a disciple.

They had seen this demoniac break chains. Now, somehow, Jesus has tamed him. They had been successful pig farmers. Now, a sizable herd is gone, no doubt due, somehow, to Jesus.

The Gerasenes wanted nothing to do with Jesus, and wanted Jesus to have nothing to do with them. So, they pleaded with Him to leave their territory.

How ironic. The demons wanted permission to stay in The Decapolis. It's a nice place for demons, evidently. But the citizens of this region want Jesus gone!⁷

Jesus listened to the request that He leave - and He took their request seriously. He walked away, preparing to cross the Sea of Galilee again to return to the Capernaum area.

But, there was one Gerasene who broke with the crowd. One man wasn't thinking "Good riddance!" when it came to thinking about Jesus.

The former demoniac desperately didn't want to be separated from Jesus. If Jesus was leaving, he wanted to leave, too.

Home Assignment (vv. 18-20)

Pleading for a place in the boat (v. 18)

[18] As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him.

For my money, this is an incredibly touching, tear-jerking scene. Here is this man, shamelessly begging Jesus for the privilege of sailing with Him.

And there are all kinds of reasons why he might have wanted to be with Jesus.

⁷ At least one commentator suggests that their fear stemmed from their financial loss, wondering what else Jesus might do to jeopardize their material possessions if He were allowed to stay.

He might have been afraid:

- that in Jesus' absence, the demons would return;
- of the unfriendly citizens of Gersa giving him a hard time;
- of the influences that might have resulted in his being demonized in the first place tempting him again?

Or maybe it was love that prompted him to want to leave with Jesus. After all, Jesus was the One who had given him his mind, his soul, and his life back.

Who can blame this guy for wanting to accompany Jesus? He had met Jesus as a wreck, and was now whole.

And you know, everything would point to the wisdom of allowing him to accompany Jesus and the twelve in the boat.

Make him the thirteenth apostle (they'll need one, eventually, anyway...) Let him come along. After all, how many disciples really even WANT to drop everything and follow Jesus?

So, what will Jesus do? If Hollywood was writing this script, the scene would conclude with Jesus welcoming the man with open arms, saying,

"You bet, big fella. Hop on in. Join me. There's room for you in My boat. Come, follow Me."

But that is not what Jesus says. There is no hint that what the man was asking was a bad request. But Jesus said, **"No."**

That's right. The Lord refused his request. *"No, you may not come with Me."*

"No, you can't come with Me." (v. 19)

[19] And He did not let him, but He said to him, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you."

Jesus has just appointed the recently redeemed former demoniac the first Apostle to the Gentiles of The Decapolis.

And by doing that Jesus gave this man a terrifically challenging assignment. He gave him a home assignment.

The apostle to the Decapolis (v. 20)

[20] And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Home would have been the hardest place of all for him to go. After all, the people of Gersa knew all about him. They were the ones who had watched him run through the tombs like a wild man for years. They had chained him up and seen him rip up the chains.

He had a horrible reputation. Nobody thought much of him.

But Jesus sent him home to tell others ***[19]... "what great things the Lord has done"*** for him and ***"how He had mercy"*** on him.

Well, Jesus told him to go - and go he did!

As Jesus sailed away across the Sea of Galilee, having stayed in the region just a few hours, the record of this encounter ends with this: ***[20] And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.***

The only credibility the former demoniac had was the clothing he wore. His changed life was his open door for witness.

Conclusion:

This is one of my favorite Gospel stories and it just may have become one of yours.

So many threads come together in this story. As we conclude, I'll pick out and highlight a few of the more prominent strands.

- **People who are in a mess need help.**

You and I meet people who find themselves in messes all the time. Sometimes they ARE messes. They may have shot themselves in the foot, may have gotten messed up by someone else, or may have been messed up by circumstances beyond their control.

Watch Jesus' dealings with this demoniac. He shows us that people who are in a mess need to be rescued. Period.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost messes we all are. He didn't make this man's rescue an inquisition into his past or a matter of promises for the future. He simply rescued him.

- **Jesus changes lives!**

We say this all the time, but a story like this one brings it all home: Jesus Christ changes lives. The changes He makes are real and powerful.

One day He will transform a man trapped in a demon-possessed state of insanity into a picture of calm. The next He will change a hoarder into a giver. He will change a narcissist into someone who loves sacrificially and He'll change a man or a woman addicted to lust into a model of purity.

Jesus has been changing lives for two thousand years. He still changes lives. He has and will continue to change yours. He will change the lives of those you love. Ask Him to do that.

- **Ministry may lead to rejection.**

Notice that when Jesus cast demons out of the man, a heroic, kind and wonderful work, the citizens of that region asked Him to leave the country. Hmm...

Don't expect that serving Jesus today will necessarily result in popularity. It may lead to rejection. That may be what is involved in following Jesus. Let's just remember that nothing - NOTHING! - compares to the joy of being God's agent in touching another life.

- **Yes, Jesus can use even you**

Look at the man Jesus left behind to serve as His first witness to the Decapolis. A very recently redeemed former naked, insane, demoniac.⁸

If you are ever tempted to think, "*God would (or could) never use someone like me to make a difference*" - think again. He used the Gerasene demoniac. There is nothing in your past that would disqualify you from being in His service.

- **Saved to live the life Jesus chooses.**

For the former demoniac, following Jesus involved doing something very hard (staying home) and not doing the very thing he wished to do (climb in the boat with Jesus).

He was saved to live the life Jesus chose for Him. And that is what he did. Today, the former demoniac serves as our example. We obey Jesus - and then find LIFE in the obeying.

- **Redeemed to share with others.**

There are some whom Jesus changes who are given assignments to exotic places and remote areas and foreign lands. God bless them for going.

But much more often, like the former demoniac, we will be given a "home assignment." Jesus touches us and we will be given the mission to let our light shine at home, at work, at school. Today, can you hear the voice of Jesus to you in His words to the former demoniac?

[19]... "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you."

⁸ The whole scene is reminiscent of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1. In describing that church, he wrote that it was made up of *[26]... not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; [27] but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, [28] and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, [29] so that no man may boast before God.*