

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Follow the Leader

#### **Follow Jesus into WITNESS!**

(Mark 5:1-20)

Study #3

#### Introduction: Jesus draws a crowd... *where?*

In recent weeks we have been learning to follow our Leader. Today, I want us to watch as Jesus, our Leader, attracts a crowd.

The line to notice is the first phrase of the first verse of the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark's Gospel. Mark tells us, "***In those days, where there was again a large crowd...***"

A large crowd had gathered to hear Jesus. OK. That's not unusual. But the gathering of this particular crowd is a curiosity. Let me explain why it is surprising that Jesus might have attracted a crowd, given the setting of Mark 8.

Beginning with His baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus rapidly became a popular preacher in the Jewish-inhabited regions of Galilee and Judea. He traveled north and south throughout Palestine teaching, healing and generally "***doing good***" (Acts 10:38)

His fame spread by word of mouth (remember, in Jesus' day that is the only way news *could* spread) and crowds followed Him everywhere He went.

BUT, Mark 8 places Jesus in a different geographic region.

In Mark 8, Jesus was not in Galilee or Judea. He was in a land called The Decapolis. The Decapolis (Greek for "ten cities") was a mostly Gentile-inhabited region.

Jesus had not traveled extensively through this region and had spent almost no time here.

Yet Mark, in setting the scene for the miracle of the feeding of the 4,000,<sup>1</sup> tells us that "***there was again a large crowd...***"

So, the question: Where did the crowd come from? How did word get out to the Gentile population of The Decapolis that this Jewish preacher was Someone to get all excited about?

How would thousands of people have known enough about Jesus to have wanted to travel into a desolate area to hear Him speak for three days? Why would they have risked so much (like hunger and being away from work) to hear Someone speak who had never even visited their cities?

Good questions. Hold on to those questions and we'll come back to them in a bit. For now, though, turn back a few chapters, to Mark 4.

The incident we will explore today finds Jesus deep into what is often called The Great Galilean Ministry.<sup>2</sup> This first period of Jesus' ministry lasted about a year and a half.

During this season, He left His hometown of Nazareth and set up ministry headquarters at Capernaum. He called His disciples, performed miracles, healed all kinds of diseases, offended the religious rulers by doing things on the Sabbath they said was unlawful (but which really weren't) and in other ways witnessed to the reality of the Kingdom of God.

When we catch up to Him near the end of Mark, chapter 4, Jesus had been teaching and preaching and telling stories. Some of our favorite parables are found in Mark, chapter 4.

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<sup>1</sup> This was a completely different event than the better known feeding of the 5,000, mentioned in Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9, and John 6.

<sup>2</sup> So A.T. Robertson in his book, A Harmony of the Gospels.

He told the parable of the sower and the soils and the one about the lamp that gives light to a house. He told about a farmer who cast seed on the soil and waited until the seed germinated and then started to grow and then produced a crop. He told the story about the mustard seed, which, even though very tiny, grew into a great tree.

And after this extensive time of teaching, Jesus and His twelve got into their boat to cross to *“the other side”* of the Sea of Galilee.

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

#### **Sailing Across the Sea of Galilee (v. 35)**

*[4:35] On that day, when evening came, He said to them, “Let us go over to the other side.”*

This sailing venture would have taken them from the northwest side of the sea to the southeast side, from the region of Galilee to a region called The Decapolis, that Gentile-inhabited area I mentioned earlier.

As they were sailing, a storm arose on the sea.

It is not unusual for fierce storms to descend on the Sea of Galilee with great suddenness. The storms can sweep down from any of the hills that surround the lake. The winds follow the furrows in the hills down to the water and then churn the lake into a tempest.

Well, one of those storms arose during this crossing with Jesus and His twelve disciples. Mark describes the scene for us. I think it sounds awful!

#### **Storm!! (4:37-38a)**

*[4:37] 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. [38a] Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion*

The sea is raging - and Jesus is sleeping. That is either a picture of total exhaustion or perfect peace. Perhaps both!

But the disciples were definitely NOT asleep! While they had been battling sea-storms for years, this one was more than they could handle. In their panic they called for help.

#### **The Storm Ceases! (4:38b-40)**

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

Now remember that 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 squall to a land-lubbing carpenter from Nazareth!

Their seemingly odd cries for help to Jesus were well placed, though.

*[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.*

The sea did exactly what He told her to do and ceased from her raging!

Talk about exploding the disciples’ categories! After calming the sea, He turned to them and said, *[40]... “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”* And they looked at each other and wondered (out loud)...

#### **Awed by This Jesus (v. 41)**

*[41]... “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”*

That experience on the Sea of Galilee proved a watershed for those men. They were forced to reckon with a question each of us is actually faced with as well - *“Who is this Jesus?”*

The Lord was then and is now constantly prodding those who would follow Him to come to a more complete understanding of who He is. He still challenges the boxes we have built for Him.

He wants us to know that He is more than a man of God, more than a prophet, more than a good, moral teacher. He is God incarnate, ruler over all creation.

So, during that adventure on the sea the disciples learned something about this Leader they had begun to follow. They are about to learn even more.

Having shown Himself capable of pacifying a raging sea, Jesus next turned His attention to a raging soul.

With calmed waters outside and jittery disciples inside, the boat came to shore. Mark tells us that they beached in the region of the Gerasenes, on the southeast shore of the Sea.<sup>3</sup>

One of the citizens of the town (it is not clear whether he is a Gentile or not) becomes the center of attention.

### **Stilling a Storm in a Soul (Mark 5:1-20)**

#### **Into Foreign Territory (5:1-5)**

*[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*

This is not the only time demons or demon possession is mentioned in the Bible, or in the Gospels. Jesus dealt with people who were oppressed by the devil on a number of occasions.

- He healed many who were demon-possessed on the same night He healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Matthew 8:16);
- He cast a demon out of a man who was mute (Matthew 9:32) and another who was blind and mute (Matthew 12:22);
- He gave His disciples authority to cast out demons (Matthew 10:1);

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<sup>3</sup> It seems best to understand the location being a town called Gersa, located on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. (Plummer, ICC; also I. Howard Marshall in his commentary). Robertson says that the city was actually about six miles south of the Sea of Galilee.

- He cleansed the demon-possessed daughter of a Gentile woman (a Syro-Phoenician) (Matthew 15:22);
- He cast an unclean spirit out of a man who had approached Him in the Capernaum synagogue (Luke 4:35).

There were other times, too, when Jesus confronted the devil, such as His own temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4).

From beginning to end, the Bible assumes the existence of a real, personal devil and his demons. The world of angels and demons is considered as real as the existence of God, angels, and the afterlife.

The Bible does not attribute all illnesses to demonic forces. Some are and some are not due to the work of demons. Sometimes, mental illness is attributed to demons and sometimes it is not.

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

How he came to be in this condition is anybody's guess. Was he involved in some sin that opened the way for demonic activity? Was he 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 very 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.

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

He is a human mess, a stark created-in-the-image-of-God tragedy standing in front of Jesus.

This man (who is never named) was a citizen of the closest city (probably Gersa). But he didn't live in the city. He didn't live in a house.

He lived among the tombs that were built into the cliffs that are near the Sea. There was an animal wildness about him. Everything about him reeks of uncleanness. Listen:

*[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.*

He was self-destructive. He would take stones and gash himself, wounding himself.

The demon-possessed man was afflicted with terrible physical strength. At times, neighbors had tied him up with chains. Every time, though, supernatural strength would course through his body and he would break the chains.<sup>4</sup>

Now, the demoniac has become too wild. No one approaches him anymore, and he is left free to roam through the tombs and in the deserted areas like a wild beast.

Now Jesus did not go searching for him. He approached Jesus. And, using the vocal chords of the man, the demon spoke to Jesus.

### **A Power Encounter (5:6-13)**

*The demons' fear (vv. 6-8)*

*[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!" [8] For He had been saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!"*

<sup>4</sup> Immense physical strength is a phenomenon that is mentioned frequently in the literature that deals with 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.<sup>5</sup> And, using the body of the possessed man, it fell down in front of Jesus.

The demon had been tormenting this son of Adam for years - but it begs Jesus to **not** be tormented.

Jesus asked the demon(s) within the man a question.

*Jesus and the demons "talk" (vv. 9-10)*

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."<sup>6</sup>*

This tells us that there was not one, but many, many demons afflicting this man.

The number of soldiers in a Roman legion varied, so we can't even give a firm number to the military term. Generally, a legion consisted of from 5-6,000 soldiers. Evidently, there were thousands of demons tormenting this man.

Clearly, he was miserable beyond anything we can imagine. Like a legion, the demons conspired together to form a unit that was strong, cruel, and destructive.

But, the demons have met their match in Jesus, and they know it.

The demons beg (v. 10)

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

<sup>5</sup> 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!

<sup>6</sup> One of my sources tells me that a Roman legion had 6,826 men.

For reasons not made clear here, Jesus agreed to their request and allowed them to continue to remain in this same region. But He would NOT permit them to continue to torture the man!

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

***[11] Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain.<sup>7</sup> [12] The demons implored Him, saying, “Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.”***

Nearby was a grazing herd of swine - a big herd! And the unclean demons requested permission to enter the unclean pigs. Jesus gave them permission, and the rest makes for very interesting reading.

***[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.***

When the swine herders saw what had happened, they positively freaked!

They ran back to town and told the news about the pigs to the folks back in Gerasa. And, of course, the rubber-necking townsfolk wanted to see this spectacle for themselves, so they ran back to the scene.

What they saw left them speechless!

### **A Call for Jesus to Leave**

*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. [15] 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”; and they became frightened.***

What would have greeted the eyes of the citizens of the city of Gerasa when they arrived on the scene? They would have gazed out at the south end of the Sea of Galilee and seen a couple thousand dead pigs floating in the water!

Then, they would have looked away from the sea to where Jesus was. Another sight entirely met them.

The man who had been ravaging the countryside for years, who had been making passage through the area unsafe for everybody, who continually screamed at the top of his lungs as he ran through the tombs while cutting himself with rocks, is now sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and perfectly calm.

And it is when they see THIS that the Bible tells us, ***“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 at the feet of Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

How great is this! This is fantastic!

That’s what YOU think. 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.***

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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, this Jesus has tamed him (and what does that make Jesus?!).

They had been successful pig farmers. Now, a sizable herd is gone. (and what did this Jesus fellow have to do with that?!).

The citizens sized up the situation and conclude that they don't want anything to do with Jesus. The demons didn't want to be removed from the region, but the citizens want Jesus removed for good!<sup>9</sup>

Well, Jesus heard their request that He leave, and respected their wishes. He turned, and with His disciples, began to make preparations to cross the Sea of Galilee again to return to Capernaum.

BUT, there was one Gerasene who broke with the crowd. The former demoniac desperately didn't want to be separated from Jesus. If Jesus was leaving, he wanted to leave, too.

### A Call for One Man to Stay

*"Let me go with you, Jesus!" (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.***

This is a very touching scene. Here is this man, shamelessly begging Jesus for the privilege of sailing with Him, going with Him, being with Him. He wants nothing more than to follow Jesus.

Why? Well, maybe -

- he feared that, in Jesus' absence, the demons would return.
- he dreaded returning to the unfriendly city that had been home.
- he just wanted to be with the Man who had given him his mind, his soul, and his life back.

He wanted to accompany Jesus, and who can blame him? He had met Jesus as a wreck, and was now whole.

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

And it would seem that everything would point to the wisdom of allowing him to accompany Jesus and the twelve in the boat.

Let him come along, Jesus. 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 have concluded with Jesus welcoming the man with open arms, saying,

*"You bet, big fella'. Hop on in. Join me. I'll make room for you and you can be an honorary '13<sup>th</sup>' apostle."*

But that is not what happens. There is no hint that the man was making a bad request.

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

*Mission: DIFFICULT! (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."***<sup>10</sup>

Interesting...

Jesus left this former demoniac behind as the "apostle" to The Decapolis. This man with the worst reputation imaginable is to be the one who will bring the message about who Jesus is to those who just now begged Him to leave them alone!

No people needed the message of Jesus more than these people who were begging Him to depart! And this man who had experienced Jesus' touch firsthand is tasked with bringing the message to them.

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<sup>10</sup> In Galilee and Judaea, where Jesus and His disciples preached, He commonly told those who were healed to be silent about their cures. In this half-heathen region of Perea (the Decapolis) there were no other missionaries.

Jesus has given this man a terrifically challenging assignment. He has told him: “*Go home.*”

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 “*what great things the Lord God has done*” for him and “*how He had mercy*” on him.

That was his mission and the man accepted the mission!

*Mission ACCEPTED! (v. 20)*

Jesus had only been in The Decapolis a few short hours. But as He sailed northwest back to Galilee, the record of this encounter ends with this: **[20] And he** [i.e. - the former demoniac] **went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.**

What was this man’s credibility? Nothing much. Just the clothes on his back, the clear look in his eyes, his self-controlled disposition. It was his changed life that served as his open door for witness.

So, how did he do? Was he an effective witness?

We don’t know for sure, but there is a hint. At the beginning this morning, I asked a question, based on a short phrase found at the beginning of Mark, chapter 8. Remember?

In Mark chapter 8, we read about a time when Jesus was back in The Decapolis, this time for a more extended stay. And the narrative begins with this: “***In those days, where there was again a large crowd...***”

I asked, “*Where did the crowd come from?*”

How did a region populated by Gentiles find out enough about Jesus to be willing to follow Him into the wilderness, stay with Him for three days, hang on to every word, and face hunger just to be with Him and to hear Him teach?

They must have heard reports about Him. Someone must have been spreading the news.

My strong suspicion is that the former demoniac, having experienced the grace and goodness of God through the touch of Jesus, did exactly and joyfully what Jesus told him to do.

His own life was changed forever and He told others about the life-changing impact Jesus could have on them, too.

So, naturally, when Jesus came to their region for a more extended stay, He was greeted by crowds of people who had heard all about Him from the man from whom Jesus had cast out a legion’s worth of demons!<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion:

Over the past couple of weeks you and I have seen Jesus model a life of prayer and a life committed to community. He has called us to follow Him into prayer and into community.

Today we have taken another cue about what it means to follow Him by watching His interaction with the Gerasene demoniac.

What this episode in Jesus’ life tells us is that if we are serious about following our Leader, we can be certain that our Leader will lead us into **witness**. Into **proclamation**.

This man desperately wanted to get in the boat and follow Jesus. With every fiber of his being he wanted to be with the One who had given him life.

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<sup>11</sup> I’m indebted to E.M. Blaiklock for this suggestion found in the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. Article: Decapolis.

But for him, following the Leader meant staying right where he was and telling everyone he met what His Leader had done for him.

Let's take a moment here at the end to summarize what we have seen in Jesus' dealings with the Gerasene demoniac.

- **1 - People who are in a mess need help!**

We meet people who are messes all the time. They may have shot themselves in the foot, may have gotten messed up by someone else, or have been messed up by circumstances beyond their control. Jesus' dealings with this demoniac show us that people who are in a mess need to be helped. Period. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost messes we ALL are.

- **2 - Jesus changes lives!**

The changes Jesus makes in a life are as varied as the needs of the people He changes. He'll change one from demon-possessed insanity to ***“power and love and a sound mind.”*** But he'll change another from materialistic hoarding to gracious generosity. Another who is overwhelmed with the temptation to lust will find the beautiful freedom of purity. Jesus has been changing lives for two thousand years. He still changes lives.

- **3 - No matter who you are, Jesus can use you!**

Jesus left this former demoniac as the “apostle” to this region. Isn't that just like Jesus? The whole scene reminds us of Paul's description of the makeup of ~~Northwest Community Church~~ the church at Corinth (☺). He wrote that it was made up of ***[26]... not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble...*** If you are ever tempted to think, *“God would never use me to make impact for His work here on earth”* or *“God could never use someone like me to make a difference”* - think again! He used the Gerasene demoniac. He can use you, too!

- **4 - You were saved to live the life Jesus chooses!**

For the former demoniac, following Jesus meant DOING something very hard, and it meant NOT DOING the very thing he wished to do. More than anything else, he wanted to climb into that boat and sail away with Jesus and the Twelve. But for him, “following the Leader” meant that he would have to stay behind. That is what he did. And he serves as a model to you and to me of what “follow the Leader” is all about. It is not to live the life WE choose. It is to live the life He chooses.

- **5 - You were saved to bring the Gospel to others!**

For some people and at some times, Jesus asks us to follow Him on cross-cultural trips to far away places to tell people about Him. More often, like the former demoniac, we will be given a “home assignment.” Jesus touches us and we will let our light shine at home, at work, at school. Today, Jesus says to each of us what He said to that man on that day, ***[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.”***