

“Led In and Delivered Out”
Mark 5:1-20

The New Living Translation describes the scene this way: “This man lived in the burial caves ... Day and night he wandered among the burial caves and in the hills, howling and cutting himself with sharp stones.” (Mark 5:3, 5, NLT)

In most translations, it says that the demoniac lived among the tombs, but “burial caves” helps to illustrate what these tombs were like in that region of the Middle East. It wasn’t like our modern cemeteries. No, these tombs would be found in caves amidst very hilly landscape. And when they didn’t use natural caves, tombs were often cut out of the side of a mountain, *creating a cave*. Our story indicates that the afflicted man used a collective of caves like these for shelter – which is ironic, because just as the darkness inside him shunned the light of God, the tombs would have extended his attempts at avoiding the light – totally withdrawn from society.

Fortunately for him, the true Light found him ... But I want you see yet another irony – perhaps the most pervasive darkness is *not* the demon-possessed man but the reaction of the townspeople, because after the miraculous healing, rather than celebrating the light Christ offered, they were afraid and pushed him away ... while the healed man becomes a witness to the Light.

I find the response of the people astounding. What frightens them is that this man who was evil, *becomes good*. What frightens them is the *holy*, not the unholy. Luke puts it this way in his Gospel, “Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear” ... Doesn’t it strike you as

strange that these people are afraid of the *wrong* things and *comfortable* with the wrong things? ... These people are afraid of that which ought to comfort them. They are afraid of the light that has broken through into their own cave-tombs ... And you know the scariest thing of all? Their story is, more often than we realize, *our* story.

One thing that the people and the demons inside the man had in common was – they didn't want to be bothered, by what God had in mind ... Look at verse 7 with me ... Legion addresses Jesus and says, "*What have you to do with me Jesus, Son of the Most High?*" What does he mean by that? ... Again the NLT captures the idea well, translating the verse, "*Why are you interfering with me, Jesus?*" In other words, "Why are you bothering me?" It seems like something we'd just pass over because we know the reason: "*Because you're evil, and you gotta go, that's why!*" But it's actually a vital question.

Extend the question to *all of us* ... Why doesn't God just leave you alone? Why doesn't He just let you live your life the way you want without interfering with all of His pronouncements about how you're supposed to live, and how you're supposed to treat other people, and how you're supposed to love Him, and how you're supposed to love others? ... Why does the Word of God challenge you? Why does the Holy Spirit pressure you to improve and become a better person? Why does God seek you when you're lost and then, even after you're found, keep on trying to hold you to the straight and narrow? Why doesn't God just leave...you...alone?

In college, I was part of a ministry called New Life. Weekly, we would go to George Junior Republic, an at-risk youth correctional facility. One day, while we were sharing about Christ, one of the older boys said, "Why don't you Christians just leave me alone?" And one of my friends replied, "It's because *God* doesn't want you *left* alone" ...

And that's true ... God doesn't want to leave us alone for eternity, in self-imposed isolation ... in the depths of the caves we've wandered into, trying to get out, but in reality just getting more lost, deeper and deeper.

NT professor Darrell Bock speaks to this when he writes, *"Texts about demons are difficult for many modern people because they ask us to deal in categories [that are foreign to us]. But when we see the horrific destructive character of our culture, and how terribly we can treat one another, it is hard NOT to recognize the presence of diabolical evil in our world. It takes more than our own efforts to reverse its presence. That reality is portrayed in this event. On our own, our efforts are as successful as the attempts by the locals to chain the demoniac in order to restrain him. The chains and fetters of our good intentions are left in pieces on the ground. The power of Jesus is needed."*¹

We need the power of Jesus to face the widespread problem that our society – all of us – have become too comfortable with evil ... The haunting aspect of Luke's Gospel is that the people had gradually become used to the presence of evil. Here is a man filled with so many demons that his name is Legion – referring to a regiment of 6,000 soldiers. But the exact number of demons isn't the point our Gospel writer is trying to make.

People had to chain him hand and foot, and it appears people in the community took turns watching over him. That may have been a hassle, but the text indicates they were bothered far more by Christ's presence ... the community can live with a crazy, naked, self-mutilating man living in the local tombs, but they throw Christ out of their community. And by doing that, they throw out the only hope they have for redemption.

1 Darrell Bock, NIV Application Commentary: Luke (Zondervan), 244.

What is wrong with our communities is not simply the presence of homelessness, violence, drug abuse ... though of course these involve serious, deep-seated needs to be addressed. But more at the heart of the matter is that there needs to be a clear Christian presence in our community to offer hope and healing. What's wrong with our society is that it is too often missing something — us.

Jesus Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, (Matt 5:13-16), said, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Jesus called us the light of the world. But have we *hidden* our light? Is our light *shining out* in our communities? And I know that it's hard to be that light of the world. That salt of the earth. That Christian presence in our culture. It takes great courage to let your faith touch the lives around you that need the light of Christ ... Like those in our passage, people often don't want to be bothered by what Christ has to offer ... Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians: “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be of courage; be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). The most important way we can improve our community is to live our faith day to day *in the midst* of our community.

And we find that in our story, in the strangest of places ... And it's right in front of the townspeople's faces. They see the new character that now inhabits the formerly possessed man. He is seated calmly at the feet of Jesus, restored, clothed and of sound

mind. But it doesn't stop there ... look what happens at the end. The once-bound-now-free man wants to join Jesus' traveling group of disciples – but Jesus has another calling in mind ... *Someone* must stay behind to share what God has done.

That is the man's task ... and it wouldn't have been easy. Think about it – 1) the stigma and prejudice against this man would still have been firmly in place among many in the community, 2) they *still* felt “put off” by Jesus for his blow to their economy with the loss of the pigs, 3) this Jesus he praised was a Jew and they were mostly Gentiles, and 4) they were afraid of Christ's power ... The *delivered* man could now see clearly, but those who had SEEN the miracle were still blind – in fact, they could see even *less* than the former demoniac could see in the caves.

I've been in several caves – Mammoth Cave in KY; Laurel Caverns in PA. I've heard on more than one occasion that a person who lives in total darkness for just a few months will become irrevocably blind. Darkness not only hinders sight, it causes blindness.

Perhaps the biggest tragedy of all is to see God at work and act as if nothing has really happened. Our new evangelist had his work cut out for him *indeed*. Nevertheless, he proclaimed what Jesus had done for him. [P] Those whose lives are most radically transformed often end up being the boldest witnesses for Jesus.

And if you think that YOUR living of the Christian life will have no effect, think again. One life can make all of the difference. Rosa Parks is one of the heroes of the Civil Rights Movement. She is not remembered for any speeches she gave, or books she wrote, or meetings she had with the President, or for organizing millions of people to march on Washington. She is remembered for riding in a bus in a community that was segregated.

Segregation was a way of life. It was an evil that everyone lived with. It was an evil that was accepted. It was an evil people were comfortable with. Like the naked, demon-possessed man in the caves, no one was frightened by it. But Rosa Parks got on a bus one day and said, "No more. Not today." And she took a seat where she wasn't supposed to sit ... One voice, one action, added with a lot of other single voices made a change.

In Mark 5:19, Jesus says, "Go home ... and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." Notice, he didn't say, "Go into the synagogues of the land and proclaim the miracle of your cure," but "Go home!" We're not supposed to be doing our main proclaiming of Jesus here in the religious gatherings and comfort zones ... but the places where it's more *personal* ... It was a hard command for that ostracized man to obey, "Go to thy house, to thy friends, to thy own community" but he obeyed – it says in the next verse, "The man went away to visit the Ten Towns of that region and began to proclaim the great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed at what he told them."

Herbert Lockyer writes, "It was thus that Jesus delivered the most terrible sufferer from infernal power in all the records of the gospels, and fashioned him into a preacher of salvation to ten cities. Jesus went to the Gerasenes and there found a demoniac, but he left behind an evangelist."

To close let me read to you Ephesians 5:11-14 – "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them ... Everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Amen.