

November 4, 2018
Good News.
Good News: Jesus is the highest power
Mark 5:1-20

Jesus and his disciples came to the other side of the lake, to the region of the Gerasenes.² As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, a man possessed by an evil spirit came out of the tombs.³ This man lived among the tombs, and no one was ever strong enough to restrain him, even with a chain.⁴ He had been secured many times with leg irons and chains, but he broke the chains and smashed the leg irons. No one was tough enough to control him.⁵ Night and day in the tombs and the hills, he would howl and cut himself with stones.⁶ When he saw Jesus from far away, he ran and knelt before him,⁷ shouting, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won’t torture me!”⁸ He said this because Jesus had already commanded him, “Unclean spirit, come out of the man!”⁹ Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He responded, “Legion is my name, because we are many.”

They pleaded with Jesus not to send them out of that region.¹¹ A large herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside.¹² “Send us into the pigs!” they begged. “Let us go into the pigs!”¹³ Jesus gave them permission, so the unclean spirits left the man and went into the pigs. Then the herd of about two thousand pigs rushed down the cliff into the lake and drowned.

¹⁴ Those who tended the pigs ran away and told the story in the city and in the countryside. People came to see what had happened.¹⁵ They came to Jesus and saw the man who used to be demon-possessed. They saw the very man who had been filled with many demons sitting there fully dressed and completely sane, and they were filled with awe.¹⁶ Those who had actually seen what had happened to the demon-possessed man told the others about the pigs.¹⁷ Then they pleaded with Jesus to leave their region.

¹⁸ While he was climbing into the boat, the one who had been demon-possessed pleaded with Jesus to let him come along as one of his disciples.¹⁹ But Jesus wouldn’t allow it. “Go home to your own people,” Jesus said, “and tell them what the Lord has done for you and how he has shown you mercy.”²⁰ The man went away and began to proclaim in the Ten Cities all that Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

Last week we were together in the boat with Jesus. We have threatening storms around us and we learned that the best way to endure the storms is to get closer to Jesus, trust in His presence, even if He is asleep, and wait. Too many times we want the storm to quit right away before learning to trust, to deepen our faith and learn to have peace just because Jesus is in our boat.

As we grow in our faith we approach the other side of the lake. Life is good. Jesus is with us. Maybe it is not so good. What is on the other shore? It is the land of the enemy known as Gentiles. There are two thousand unclean pigs. No self-respecting Jew would be caught near a pig. They are in a cemetery which automatically

defiles a person. To make matters worse – A wild man under the control of Satan and thousands of demons rushes up to them.

The disciples were afraid when Jesus calmed the storm. There is no record of their reaction to this new situation.



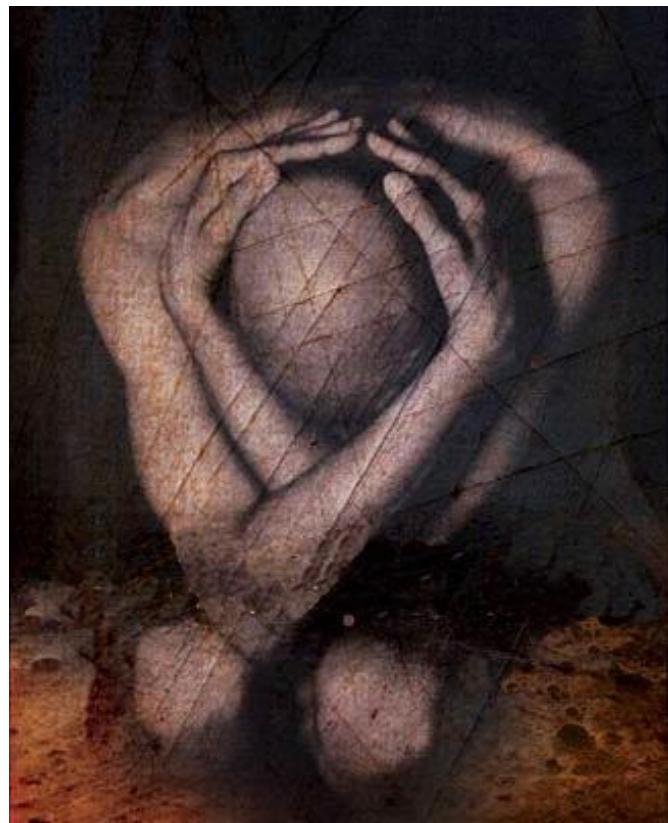
I think it is quite appropriate to talk about spirits, especially since we just experienced Halloween.

On Monday we went to the high school to the safe trick or treat party. I think it is wonderful that the school would organize such an event.

I have trouble understanding is why somebody would like to be scared? I did not grow up in the culture of Halloween and Trick or Treat so I know it is my problem but I am open to learn. The one room we did not enter was the haunted house. It probably was not that scary because it was for kids, but I am just cannot grasp the idea of enjoying a feeling of fear. The Bible is filled with verses, “have peace, peace I leave you, do not be afraid.” That is what I seek. One day I might get it. For me I think I have enough things in my life that scare me. Here in America we have plenty to scare us – The shooting in a Synagogue, the shooting in Mother Emmanuel Methodist Church, Columbine, child molesters. The list is endless. Why do I need to add to fear? Nevertheless the kids came back with buckets full of candy and were the happiest children.

The word Halloween is the shortened version of All Hallows Evening. Like Christmas Eve it was to be a time of preparation for celebrating All Saints Day and All Souls Day – November 1 and 2. In Lithuania these two days are national holidays to remember loved ones who have gone on before us. Every cemetery is filled with candles in red glass containers. It is a beautiful sight in the evening.

Today's text talks about truly scary things. "As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, a man possessed by an evil spirit came out of the tombs.³ This man lived among the tombs, and no one was ever strong enough to restrain him, even with a chain.⁴ He had been secured many times with leg irons and chains, but he broke the chains and smashed the leg irons. No one was tough enough to control him.⁵ Night and day in the



tombs and the hills, he would howl and cut himself with stones".

Jesus and His disciples meet not just a possessed man, but a man terribly possessed, living a life of misery and torment. Mark, the shortest gospel uses a lot of words to describe the scene and the man. Why would he want us to know about this man in such detail? Firstly, he lived among the graves. The belief of the time was that graveyards were places where evil spirits lived.

Secondly, he had superhuman strength. All attempts to restrain him had failed. The man probably became dangerous, so that they tried to chain him. Chains were torn

apart like string, and no one was willing, even as part of a group, to try to restrain him. He was a terror to all: Tormented and self-destructive.

And thirdly, he wandered among the tombs and went up into the mountains crying out and cutting himself with stones. He was often, no doubt, seen from afar as a wild and desolate figure, and he would undoubtedly have been a person of wide renown. The cutting of himself with stones may simply have represented self-hatred, a not uncommon feature of such possessed people, or it may have been connected with demon rites.

There several ways we can deal with the subject of evil spirits:
First, we simply do not talk about it at all. We ignore it probably because we do not understand them or we have found other ways to explain behavior.

Second, we make it fun, if you can call it that. We laugh as we scare people at Halloween.

Third, we can become so obsessed that we see evil and talk about it all the time.

None of these are the best way to deal with it. We have to recognize them for what they are. From the very beginning, in the garden of Eden there was a serpent who tempts, who lies, who wants to take us from closeness to God, who binds us and finally gives us death. Evil destroys you inside out.

Jesus recognized Satan for who he was during the trial in the wilderness and when Peter tried to convince him to not suffer and die on the cross. In the book of Acts Paul cast the demon out of the slave girl. Peter wrote, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

Let us consider again this man. Many people do hate themselves. This demon possessed man was cutting himself. He was self-destructive. How many of us sabotage any progress we make in developing healthy habits and spiritual disciplines? How many times have you and I ruined a relationship that was improving? We cannot explain why.

We do not have to look far to find people in such dark places that all they see is darkness in themselves and around them. The pain is too big and too strong. They do not want to be where they are but neither they nor anyone else is able change things. That may even describe your situation.

The power that was in him was stronger than him. I really do not think he wanted to be the way he was, but the evil power tied him up. How many times have I experienced no strength in me. I am more than willing to quit. I understand it is not from God, but I cannot stop destroying myself and others around me. I see it in myself and in others that willingness, by itself, is not enough. You find yourself isolated, helpless and in the bondage the chains you cannot break.

This man was isolated and in torture every day. He lived in darkness and could not change it.

Maybe when the text was read you were so far away from it because you cannot relate with it at all. But I believe there is something very relevant for you and me this morning from this text.

This man, evil possessed, meets Jesus. Jesus comes into the most hopeless, helpless situations, where only darkness and pain exist. Everybody turned and had given up. Jesus comes and meets this man. "When he saw Jesus from far away, he ran and knelt before him,⁷ shouting, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!"

This is ironic. Who was torturing whom? How could Jesus make his situation worse?

Evil spirits recognized Jesus and his authority immediately. Yes, the man knelt before Jesus. You all have heard the verse: "So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father". I usually think of all people who will know and recognize and praise God, but the verse says: In heaven and on earth and under earth. Think of a bigger picture -- all, all the angels, all evil, all the legions of demons will bow down. Sometimes I am amazed by what a power we are talking about.

We are given a little glimpse of Jesus' authority. Legion means 6,000 or more. All of them fall down on their knees. No fight. They have no power even close to equal. Jesus is all powerful. We worship the omnipotent God. Satan is very powerful. With Jesus there is not even a fight because Jesus is so much bigger and stronger and all powerful.

These evil powers begging to let them go into the pigs. They recognize that they will have to leave. Jesus has the victory. But they cannot be without a place. "A large herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside.¹² "Send us into the pigs!" they begged. "Let us go into the pigs!". Jesus did that. Why? I do not know.

I have two questions. In the grocery store you can buy Deviled Ham. Does it come from these pigs? ☺

You use the expression, "to go hog-wild". Does it come from this story? ☺

We can be so distracted by what is not the most important thing. We can get so focused on the pigs and the loss of the pigs that we no longer want to have Jesus around us.

In fact, Jesus scares many of us more than any ghost at Halloween.



Listen to what happened to the story. "They saw the very man who had been filled with many demons sitting there fully dressed and completely sane, and they were filled with awe."

Nearly every other translation says the people were afraid. The Amplified Bible says they were "seized with alarm and struck with fear."

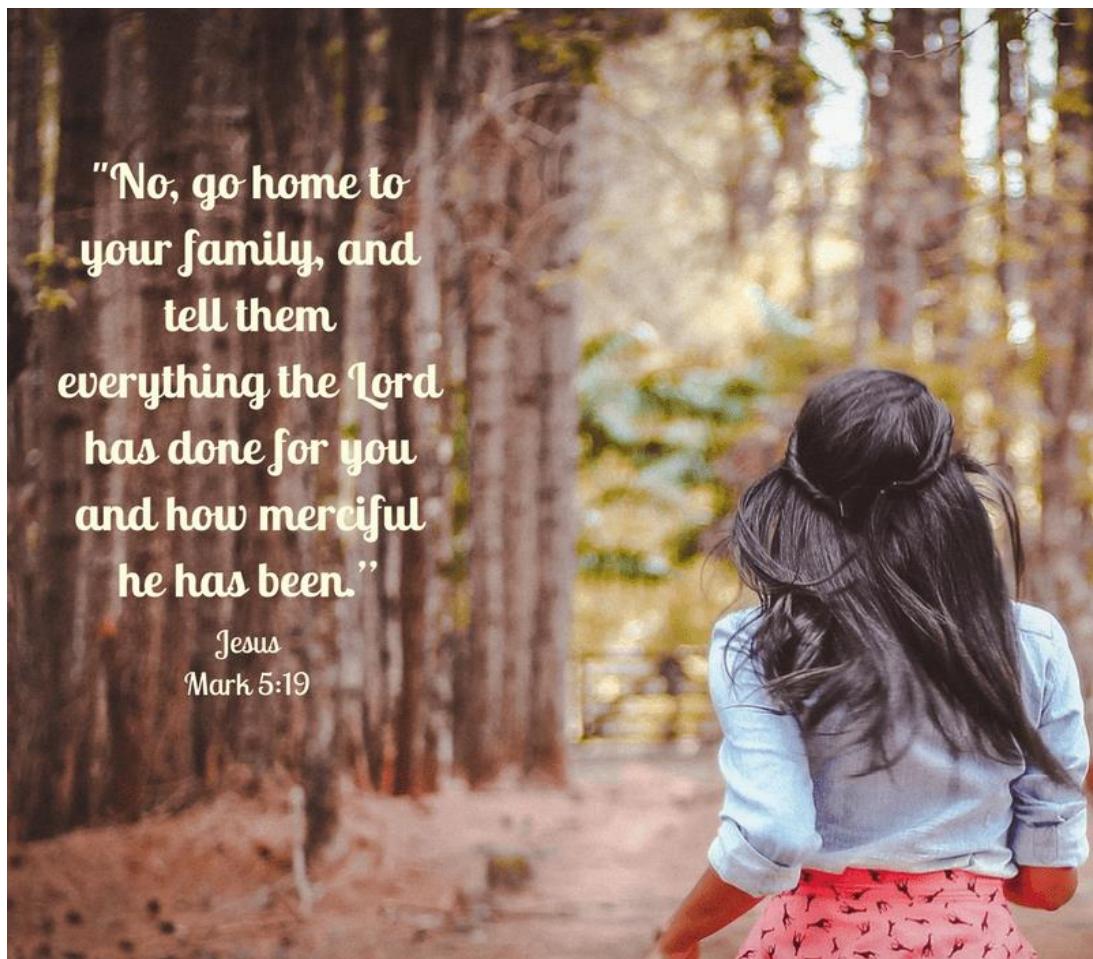
¹⁶ Those who had actually seen what had happened to the demon-possessed man told the others about the pigs. ¹⁷ Then they pleaded with Jesus to leave their region".

The man who was tortured, possessed by the demons is now in peace, healed and free. The people did not like it !? Why would they prefer the old way, the demon possessed man over a healthy man? Were their possessions more important than winning one soul out of evil?

They asked Jesus to leave. There is nothing wrong with having what you have, but never lose what is the most important. People are in need. People need to hear, to see and witness the power of God.

Only the man realized, because he knew the life before and after. Once he was unclean but now his was washed as white as snow. When you yourself experience the difference between being enslaved to the anger, pride, judging, pornography, alcohol,

drugs and being saved out of that bondage there is nothing you want more than to be with Jesus and to follow Jesus.



"Go and tell". The very first missionary was a demon possessed man.

He wanted to stay there at Jesus' feet and enjoy the safety and security, but Jesus had a mission for him. Jesus knew he is ready. He did not have to have a theology degree. He did not need to learn or to know more. The best story he had was what Jesus has done for him. The best story -- the best message – you can tell is what Jesus has done for you. There is no need to know more or to have more or use better methodology. Tell what Jesus has done for you. What did he do for you? Have you experience the healing, freeing power of Jesus?

I'm so glad Jesus lifted me.
Satan had me bound; Jesus lifted me.
When I was in trouble, Jesus lifted me.
Singing glory, hallelujah! Jesus lifted me.