

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

Rev. Dr. John V. Callahan Jr.

Sermon Text: Mark 5:1-20

Sermon Title: "Leaving the Tombs Behind" (Traveling through Mark's Gospel)

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Have you ever wondered where this guy came from, this demon-possessed maniac in Mark 5? What happened to him? How did he come across unclean spirits?

It's not like he was born that way. We can rule that out with much confidence. The man must have done something bad, something terrible. He committed some sin that drove him away from people, some sin that drove him away from God, made him hate his life. He could have committed any sin that we could commit. We know what sin can do to us, and it isn't pretty.

That sin he committed, possibly over and over again, drove him so far away from God and others, that he had to find a new home among the tombs. That sin must have been dark, because you don't go to the tombs, a place of the dead, unless you really have messed up. The tombs are a dark place, a cold place. Sin makes us feel cold. Sin covers our hearts with darkness, clouds our minds with such evil that is not easily removed.

And the demon-possessed maniac is chained and shackled. People tried to solve his problem of sin – they thought their methods would work. People thought they could chain him to the tombs, and so maybe that might make him better. Somehow the chains could calm him down, they thought, but they didn't work. People shackle us down with bad advice. They tell us to get over it, when we sin. “Just ignore what you did; it will go away.” But it doesn't. People say that everybody else is doing it, so why shouldn't you have some fun. That's another shackle they put on us, but it doesn't work. They tell us to party, have a good time, stop being so down on yourself. Another shackle: doesn't work.

The demon-possessed man might have placed some shackles on himself, in order to solve his problem of sin. People try self-medication, if you know what I mean, to relieve them of their sin. Just drown your sorrows in a bottle – it will do the trick. That shackle doesn't work. Did you notice that the man would spend his nights and days “crying out and cutting himself with stones.”¹ Some people – not just teenagers but also grown adults – think that cutting will somehow solve their problems. Knife cuts across the arms, not deep enough to kill but enough to hurt.

¹ Mark 5:5.

They hurt themselves in order to try and cope with “emotional pain, intense anger, and frustration.” According to the Mayo Clinic.com, “While self-injury may bring a momentary sense of calm and a release of tension, it's usually followed by guilt and shame and the return of painful emotions. And with self-injury comes the possibility of inflicting serious and even fatal injuries.”² Cutting is a shackle that doesn't work.

People read self-help books, convincing them that they can be better people. All you need to do is follow Donald Trump's steps to become rich like him, follow Beyonce's beauty tips to be as gorgeous as she, and follow Brad Pitt's or Angelina Jolie's lifestyle tips to be the perfect couple. Three or five or ten easy steps will do the trick, and our sin will disappear. Another shackle that doesn't work.

The demon-possessed man went to the tombs, thinking that isolating himself from others might do the trick. When we isolate ourselves, tell others to leave us alone because we can solve our own problems, all we do is sink deeper in our sin. The world becomes darker. Our hope dwindles. We cannot do it on our own, because our sin takes hold of us, and will not let go.

It will have complete possession of us, and there is

² <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/self-injury/DS00775>.

nothing we or others can do about it. Nobody can help, nobody expect Jesus.

It is interesting, in the Gospel of Mark, that whenever somebody is wrestling with a deep dark sin, and that somebody sees Jesus for the first time, he or she flips out. The person who needs help with sin sees Jesus, who is the only One who can help him or her with sin, and the person screams at Jesus, telling him to go away. That is strange, isn't it?

“He cried out with a loud voice and said, ‘What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore you *by God* that you do not torment me’.” Did you catch that? “By God do not torment me.” We can assume here that the demons, the great sin, within the man are speaking, not the man. The demons would definitely know who Jesus is (he just called him the Son of the Most High), and they would know what Jesus is capable of. Jesus can get rid of that demonic presence, and relieve the man of his sin. He is the only One who can do this. As a last ditch effort, the demons beg Jesus by God not to get rid of them. In effect, the demons are begging Jesus, for he is fully God, not to destroy them.

It is interesting how, when people are dealing with a deep dark sin, they see Jesus and don't want the

healing. They see Jesus, and they try to pretend that they are okay. They see Jesus, and dare to walk away from him, the only One who can solve their problems.

Jesus, however, doesn't walk away. He doesn't *by God* keep himself from tormenting the demons. Jesus torments them all right. He throws them into a pen of pigs nearby. They pigs freak out, bust through their gates, and jump in the lake, drowning almost instantly.

What does Mark say about the once demon-possessed man, when Jesus heals him? He says, “[They] saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind.”³

Sitting: when was the last time that man could sit down and just relax? When was the last time he could sit without being disturbed by those sins that possessed him? Maybe he never got to just sit down – maybe even his nights of sleeping were restless and terrorizing. He doesn't have to deal with those sins anymore. He doesn't have to be terrorized by them, feeling on edge about them. Jesus took them away. They are far gone. Even if they try to overtake him again, he knows that Jesus healed him once before.

³ Mark 5:15.

Jesus can heal him again. He can sit and rest in that thought.

Clothed: Mark tells us the man is clothed. It may be said that the man was naked, as he lived among the tombs. The man might not have worn one stitch during his long period of torment with his sins. His shackles might have been his only clothing.

Being naked is a terrible thing. When we have those dreams, in which we are running around without a stitch on, we are embarrassed. We are embarrassed in the dream, and when we wake up the embarrassment continues. Nakedness means vulnerability in a bad way. It means being out of control in a bad way. It feels as though others have an advantage over us – it feels like our sin has an advantage over us – and we can do nothing about it.

The man now is clothed. It feels good to be clothed. It feels good to be covered in some comfortable outfit that allows free movement. It's the right color, it's the right size. We don't get too hot in the summer time, or too cold in the winter. We can go about and are not embarrassed.

Sometimes when clothing is mentioned in the Bible, the adjective *new* is placed somewhere close to that word. New clothing. Not the old rags we used to

wear, but fresh, clean, stunning new clothing. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul provides this imagery of taking off evil things like fornication, evil desires, and coveting, but then to put on, to clothe ourselves, with the thing of God such as mercy, kindness, love, and forgiveness. The old clothing is ratty, smelly, unattractive. But the new clothing is so attractive, so comfortable. Only Christ may provide for us such clothing, and he does when he helps us out of our old clothing first. When the sin is removed, Christ the expert Tailor puts us in something that fits us perfectly.

In his right mind: The man is now in his right mind. I remember way back in elementary school, the gym teacher wanted us to teach us how to wrestle. So he got us on the mats, and he paired us up, and showed us some basic wrestling moves. There is one thing he told us that has never left my mind: "If you can control the head, the body has to follow. Once to get a hold of somebody's head, the rest follows."

The mind is a terrible thing to waste, especially on sin. It is a terrible thing to waste our minds on fear or anger or envy or arrogance or greed or any other sin, because once that sin's got a hold of us, the rest of us follows. All that is good within us is destroyed.

But the man who once lived among the tombs is in his right mind. He doesn't fear anymore. He doesn't cry out in pain with nobody to listen. He can see clearly now – he clearly sees Jesus, and he wants to follow him. Even though he is told not to follow Jesus, he does go to the Ten Cities of his country, and tells people about what happened to him. He can be with people now. He can show people that he is in his right mind. He can correct some of the wrongs he committed with others, and even hear how they hurt him and forgive them. He may reveal to them his new clothing in Christ. His arms are healed from all the cutting. He wears no shackles, and he willingly carries the message of Christ that, yes, you too can be saved. You too can return to your right mind, and allow God to control that mind, and do things and see things of God that you have never seen before.

Something had happened to him before Jesus showed up. Something terrible had occurred, and sin had taken over. We are no different than this man who once live among tombs. We are vulnerable to sin. People place shackles on us, or maybe we are too busy putting shackles on ourselves. We may not make our homes in some cemetery around here, but the places we may visit are dour, gloomy, dead. Our perspective

might be dark, and all we can be is angry toward everybody, or ungrateful about anything that happens to us, or disrespectful toward parents or children or others.

Jesus stands before us, in the form of a friend or in the form of somebody who wants to help. We say, "It's okay - I can handle it." It isn't okay - we cannot handle it. We only sink deeper in the graveyard of our sin. We cannot resist Jesus, since he is the only One who can drag us from our cemeteries. He alone may remove our sin. He wants to remove the shackles. He wants to re-clothe us. He wants to correct our thinking, so we may see him and follow.

We know the great change that occurred for a mad man who once dealt with a host of demons. Whether we wrestle with one sin or many, we too can be transformed. Jesus can transform us from our sin, and we may leave the tombs behind.

