

## Week 6 - Mark 5:1-20

FORMERLY  
KNOWN AS  
CHRISTIAN

*This story invites more questions than it answers. As we read together, I invite you to allow yourself to be confused and to ask any question that comes to your mind. The Holy Spirit will be faithful to answer our honest questions to the extent that we need to know.*

Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee to the Eastern shore, which is primarily non-Jewish.<sup>i</sup> The only thing Jesus does in this region is cast out Legion, a large group of demons that had possessed a man to the point where he could not be controlled or even restrained by the people of the town. The demons had taken such control of this man's life that his entire personality had been absorbed. Though the man's mouth would move, it was the demons that spoke. Because of this, the man was socially isolated, unclean, mentally ill, self-harming, and separated from God. It is this man, under the control of Legion, who confronts Jesus as soon as he steps onto the shore.<sup>ii</sup>

Part of the reason this story is so strange is that Jesus has a conversation with Legion. Typically, Jesus doesn't allow demons to speak at all, but here he asks them a question: "What is your name?" thereby inviting a response. He even allows Legion to plead for mercy and to have a say in where they will be sent. Jesus allows them to enter into a herd of pigs,<sup>iii</sup> but he does not give them rest there. Immediately, the whole herd of pigs (2,000) plunged into the lake and drowned.<sup>iv</sup>

In Tim's sermon, he talked about the fact that our enemy is known. In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu<sup>v</sup> expresses the importance of this: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

We know our enemy because Christ has revealed him to us. In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul reminds his readers that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12; NIV). We also know that this enemy has been defeated. In Luke 10:17-20, seventy of Jesus' disciples return from being sent out to proclaim the good news. They are ecstatic, for "even the demons submit to [them]!" Jesus responds, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning."<sup>vi</sup>

But it's not enough to just know our enemy, or even to know that he is defeated. We must also know ourselves. Moreover, we must know who we are in Christ: beloved children of God, chosen in love and called to the service of the Most High God.<sup>vii</sup> No matter how powerful or numerous our enemy, no matter how far we may seem to be from the love of God, no matter how much it seems like the enemy has won, Christ is victorious. Legion overplayed their hand. Hoping to confront, scare, or overpower Jesus, they ended up presenting Jesus with the opportunity to bring healing and wholeness to the man and the community they had been tormenting for years.

### Questions for discussion/reflection:

1. Do you feel comfortable acknowledging and confronting the darkness in your life and in the world? Do you believe that your enemy has been defeated?
2. How well do you know yourself? What resources/practices have you used to deepen your self-understanding?<sup>viii</sup>
3. Is your identity rooted in being a beloved child of God? If not, is there something else in your life that you feel is controlling you? What drives you to be who you are or desire to be?

<sup>i</sup> This area is referred to as the Decapolis because there was a system of 10 cities that were connected politically, economically, and culturally. Though there would likely have been a significant number of Jews, the Decapolis was mostly Gentile. This is Jesus' first interaction with Gentiles in the book of Mark.

<sup>ii</sup> Typically, in Mark, there is a large crowd that greets Jesus. In this case, there is a single man with a large crowd of demons residing in him. Jesus is unknown in this region by all except the demons.

<sup>iii</sup> Pigs (as well as some other animals) were considered unclean according to Levitical law.

<sup>iv</sup> It is unclear from the text whether it was Legion or Jesus who caused the pigs to plunge into the water. Either way, the pigs (and presumably the demons) were destroyed. Scholars have suggested that this text points back to Exodus 14-15, where Pharaoh and his army are swallowed by the Red Sea after the Israelites walked across on dry land. Exodus 15 is a song testifying to God's power and victory over that which stands against His good purposes. "I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea." (The horse and its rider... the pig and its demon...)

<sup>v</sup> Sun Tzu was a highly respected and effective Chinese General and war strategist in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. His most famous work, *The Art of War*, is still used today in all manner of strategic planning and leadership training.

<sup>vi</sup> This statement has an "apocalyptic" flavor to it. Apocalypse is a literary genre which is primarily concerned with the end times and the fulfillment of prophecy. It is also characterized by fantastic imagery. The Old Testament book of Daniel contains much that is apocalyptic. Matthew 24, Mark 13, Revelation, and bits of Paul's letters are also considered by scholars to be apocalyptic.

<sup>vii</sup> "Son of the Most High God" is how Legion addresses Jesus. Though "Most High God" is originally a Hellenistic phrase, and though it is used by a demon, it is an accurate description of the God we serve. There is no one higher and no name greater than that of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

<sup>viii</sup> Contact the Center for Church Leadership for some great resources and guidance on this subject.