

January 26, 2020

The Book of Mark is most likely the first of the four gospel books to be written, sometime in the late 60s CE. In this season of Epiphany (from Christmas to Lent) we read through the first half of the gospel which focuses around the question of the identity of Jesus. Starting in Chapter 8 the story moves to one of conflict between Jesus and the forces aligned against him.

Today's section is the first healing or miraculous encounter of Jesus in Gentile lands (on the other side of the Lake). He begins, as he did in Jewish lands (Mark 1:21-28 in Capernaum) with the exorcism of an unclean spirit and the liberation of a man who was formerly as good as dead.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEA - The West side of the Sea of Galilee is Gentile land – the unclean space and place of unclean people according to the purity laws of the Jewish practice. As we'll see the word unclean means adulterated or not pure. The Gentiles were considered to be contaminated, less than equal to the Jews.

He lived among the tombs - In that time people were often buried in cave-like openings dug into the rock, big enough for a person to enter on foot, and usually high enough to allow a person to stand upright. It could easily be used as a place of shelter for a homeless man, with no where else to live. But tombs were ritually impure places because of the presence of dead bones. He's so wild that he can only live among the dead, or chooses to do so. The impurity that is caused by the dead was considered the ultimate impurity, one which could be purified through simply rites of absolution for the Jews. This man is literally as good as dead in terms of his family, community, and Jewish practice. Jesus should have steered clear of him.

he had often been restrained - δέω [deó] to tie, or to bind (restrain), to put into chains, or to imprison, usually used in reference to prisoners, put...in chains or tied up. Scholars see a direct link (*because of vocabulary and language*) between verse 4 and Mark 3:27 "27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered."

UNCLEAN SPIRIT the expression comes from two words: ἀκάθαρτος pronounced akathartos, meaning *not pure* (because mixed), such as *adulterated* with "a wrong mix" and hence "unclean" (because tainted by sin). It's the opposite of καθαίρτος - meaning that which is "clean" (pure) because it's unmixed (without undesirable elements); (figuratively) spiritually clean because it's free from the contaminating (soiling) influences of sin. Most like the original state without contamination, close to, if not created the most clearly in the image of God. (See Genesis 1:27:" So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." And Genesis 2:7 " then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils *the breath of life [pneúma]*; and the man

Mark 5:1-20

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ They came to **THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEA**, to the country of the Gerasenes. ² And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an **UNCLEAN SPIRIT** met him. ³ **He lived among the tombs**; and no one could *restrain* him any more, even with a chain; ⁴ for *he had often been restrained* with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. ⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; ⁷ and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." ⁸ For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you **UNCLEAN SPIRIT!**" ⁹ Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is **LEGION**; for we are many." ¹⁰ He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹ Now there on the hillside **a great herd of swine** was feeding; ¹² and the **UNCLEAN SPIRITS** begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." ¹³ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the **swine**;

and the herd, numbering **about two thousand**, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

¹⁴ The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. ¹⁶ Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. ¹⁷ Then they began to beg [Jesus] to leave their neighborhood. ¹⁸ As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. ¹⁹ But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." ²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

became a living being.

πνεῦμα pronounced pneuma : spirit (Spirit), wind, or breath.

So it can be translated as unclean, or impure spirit. Theologically it could be understood as having a breath that is contaminated, twisted from the holy spirit breath first given by God in creation: the divine intention for humankind.

LEGION - In the early Roman Kingdom "legion" may have meant the entire Roman army, but sources on this period are few and unreliable. The subsequent organization of legions varied greatly over time but legions were typically composed of around five thousand soldiers.

a great herd of swine - Pigs were considered unclean animals according to the Torah "And the pig, because it has a split hoof, but does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. You shall neither eat of their flesh nor touch their carcass." — Deuteronomy 14:8 & Leviticus 11:7-8

about two thousand Today the going rate for a harvest pig is \$3.50-4/lb. The average weight of a pig at harvest is 150 lbs. So the cost per pig is \$525-\$600. 2,000 pigs would be worth at least \$1,050,000-\$1,200,000. No wonder the village people wanted Jesus to leave and move on to the next town. He cost too much to have around.

in the Decapolis - The Decapolis (Greek: Δεκάπολις, Ten Cities) was a group of ten cities on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. They were grouped together because of their language, culture, location, and political status, with each functioning as an autonomous city-state dependent on Rome. It was a center of Greek and Roman culture in a region which was otherwise populated by Semitic-speaking people (Nabataeans, Arameans, and Judeans).

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What part of today's passage distrubs or bothers you?**
- **How does Jesus liberate this man, giving him a new name, ressurecting him to a new life?**
- **Why would the neighbors not show more appreciation?**
- **Why wouldn't Jesus allow the man to come with him?**
- **How do you hear an invitation from the Spirit of God for you - or us - to speak, be, act or become through this passage?**

