

## Constructing a new world (2): the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5: 1-20)

### **Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac**

*5*They came to the other side of the lake, 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 lake, and were drowned in the lake.

*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 neighbourhood. *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.

(Translation © Lawrence Moore, *Mark for Missional Disciples*, Walking the Walk Publications, 2018)

The story of the Gerasene demoniac doesn't appear in the Revised Common Lectionary. Presumably that has something to do with a 21<sup>st</sup> century embarrassment about demons – to say nothing of Jesus being apparently responsible for the wholesale drowning of a huge number of pigs!

What is lost in omitting it are the thematic, symbolic, political and

theological connections with the stilling of the storm and Jesus' construction of a new world – the ransacking of the Strong Man's house.

### **1. No 'no-go areas' for God**

Look for a moment at last week's incident (the stilling of the storm) as an incident connected directly to this week's story. Jesus is crossing the lake from the Jewish to the Gentile side. In the Jewish thought of his day, this was venturing into territory that was anti-God: "There be demons!" we might easily imagine it saying on contemporary maps!

Furthermore, Mark evokes the primordial watery chaos of Genesis 1: 2, out of which Yahweh wrests creation. He does this by framing Jesus' rebuke to the wind (1:39) as an exorcism: "Be muzzled!"

Mark intends this as more than just a story of Jesus calming the weather and performing a particularly spectacular exorcism: it is about the construction of a new world order in which Jesus is re-establishing God's sovereignty over creation, and exorcising every and all forms of hostile occupation.

In Genesis chapter 1, God creates everything that exists. God is sovereign over creation. God hands over lordship (dominion) of creation to human beings (1:28); human rebellion against God, however, brings into being a world that is hostile towards humans. Like Frankenstein, we humans, through disobedience, unleash forces beyond our control, because, without realizing it, we have handed lordship of creation to the Strong Man (Satan).

Yahweh's election of Israel, with its capital, Jerusalem, and its Temple with the Holy of Holies serves, among other things, to create a "sacred space" for Yahweh. Israel is supposed to be a picture of what the world would look like with Yahweh as king. This is why it is so important for Israel to be separate ("holy"). This is why the world is divided into two: Israel and non-Israel (ie Gentile), or "God-space" and "non-God-space".

Within this "purity" framework, Jesus venturing out on to the lake to do battle with the primordial forces ranged against God, and then to go on to a Gentile area and head for the tombs where a demoniac awaits, can only be seen as a "divine re-occupation": God, through Jesus, is re-occupying the world by heading into what the Purity System has declared to be no-go areas for a holy God. The two stories belong inextricably together; their power to amaze is because of this broader backdrop.

## **2. Jesus, the demons and the Roman Occupation**

The (re)discovery of the political Jesus of Mark's gospel has led to a recognition that Mark presents Jesus' exorcisms as being directly connected to the Roman Occupation and therefore of extraordinary political significance. Remember: neither Jesus nor his contemporaries would have distinguished between the spiritual, human, political and military realms in the way we do. Mark presents Jesus as God's one-man occupation force, ransacking the house of the Strong Man and re-establishing God as king, with all the liberation, healing and wholeness (ie salvation) that entails.

Let's therefore look at the story of the Gerasene demoniac through this lens and see what light it sheds:

1. Demons, like the Roman army, are occupying forces.
2. Demons, like the Roman army, are irresistibly powerful.

3. Occupation by both demons and Rome is a state of slavery and suffering.
4. Life under occupation is a living death.
5. The suffering and anguish of the demoniac (5: 4-7) is paralleled by the recent experience of the region under Vespasian's forces, deployed to put down a rebellion.
6. The demon(s) give their name: "We are Legion, because we are many!" It would have been impossible in either Mark's or Jesus' context to miss the connection with the Roman Occupation forces!
7. Mark tells us that the pigs "charged" down the hill – a military term.
8. The drowning of the pigs in the lake (sea) echoes the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. This is the culmination of the deliverance cycle in Exodus. The pigs (symbolizing hostile Gentile military forces imposing slavery and domination on Israel) are linked by the demons to the Exodus, Jesus' ministry under Roman Occupation and Mark's own context of the Great Uprising against Rome that would culminate in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE.
9. The Good News of the Kingdom now includes the Gentiles. God's saving activities in Jesus are not narrowly focused on Israel, but embrace the whole world. This will be the Kingdom that lasts forever. The proclamation of the Good News is now brought into direct confrontation with Roman political theology, which stated that the Roman Empire ruled by Caesar was God's benign will for the world, would bring blessing (euangellion/gospel) to the whole world by extending over the whole world and lasting forever.
10. Jesus' ministry and mission is a New Exodus – a new release from the latest manifestation of Pharaoh's Egyptian slave

system. Rome's impregnability is an appearance, rather than a reality: like both Egypt and Babylon before, Rome will be overthrown and the people will be delivered from occupation ... and all this is directly related to what God is doing in Jesus!

11. To be the church and to pray the Lord's Prayer, "Your Kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven" is, in the time of Jesus and Mark, to pray for an end to the Roman Empire. In our own time it is to recognise that no political system can ever be equated with the Kingdom. However, some point far more clearly to the Kingdom than others, and are to be encouraged, prayed for and voted for. The fact that Christians can give no ultimate allegiance to any political system must not stop them working with and within systems in critical solidarity to transform the situations of the poorest and most vulnerable people in society, because that is to make a Jesus-shaped difference.

## **Going deeper into the text (Mark 5: 1-20)**

There is much rejoicing in Mark chapter 5. The demon-possessed man is healed. The crowds are pleased; the healed man is ecstatic. But, as you know, you cannot please everyone. For the man possessed by demons, this is a Good News story, but for the man who owned the pigs, it was very definitely a Bad News story! Every silver lining has a cloud ...

- Think of the undertaker at Lazarus' funeral: every silver lining has a cloud!
- Think of the wine merchant at the wedding at Cana: every silver lining has a cloud!
- Think of the physician after blind Bartimaeus was cured: every silver lining has a cloud!

We know from our experience of church that it's hard to keep everyone happy. That experience was true for Jesus, too.

Jesus proclaimed, "God has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor!" For the poor, this was a proclamation of a silver lining and a sunny day, but for those who made their living off the poor, it was the announcement of a cloudy day.

Jesus said, "I have been sent to proclaim release to the prisoners!" – ecstatic news for the prisoners, but a cloudy day for those who maintained the systems of oppression and captivity.

Jesus said, "I am sent to proclaim the Year of the Lord's Favour!" For those in debt, the sun flooded their lives; for those who lived well in Jerusalem off the exploitation of others, this particular silver lining was a cloud.

You can't please everyone, and Jesus' ministry, although Good News to for some, was not therefore Good News to all. The proclamation of the coming Kingdom brought winners and losers: every silver lining has a cloud!

Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom brings, as our story reminds us, Bad News to the Romans and their partners in the domination

system. Maybe, if we are to be the followers of Jesus we are called to be, we have to remind ourselves that what we preach and teach and live will be experienced as Bad News by some people.

**Questions for reflection:**

- Can you think of anything we do as a church that might be a silver lining to someone?
- Can you think of anything we do that is experienced by someone as a cloud?
- What is the Bad News we proclaim, and to whom do we proclaim it?
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## **All age worship ideas (Mark 5: 1-20)**

One of the keys to good all age worship is to keep it simple and relatively short. Ideally aim for a service of 45-50 minutes. That's not to say a service can't be longer but if you are thinking of 1hr30+ think carefully about your use of space and above all else be creative, take risks and have fun – partying is integral to the kingdom but we'll leave that for a year on Luke...

### ***Thoughts and reflections***

Imagine being chained up, restricted in movement, unable to enjoy the freedom that so many do.

That is how it must have been for the demon-trapped man. His state of health has left him isolated and a prisoner to his isolation and rejection by others. This troubled man also acts as a model to understand how it

was for God's people and all the indigenous inhabitants of the land. They could go about their daily business but they were still chained by the rule of a foreign empire, The Romans controlled everything. No one was truly free.

Into this situation comes Jesus who sees the man and is moved to do something about his situation. Not without some effort he sets the man free from the unseen chains. It is costly and there is sacrifice but that sacrifice is the impurity that has come as a result of the man's entrapment. Now he is free and made whole, or clean, again.

Jesus comes into the situation of God's people and offers a new way, a direct affront to the occupying forces of Rome. He is the reminder of the one sovereign God who alone is to be worshipped and who alone brings freedom for the outcast and the oppressed through his presence and his word. This sits over and against the rule of Caesar, the Roman Emperor. Just as he sets the demon-possessed man free so he can set God's people free from the trap of injustice and oppression.

'There is power in the name of Jesus...to break every chain.' A popular chant/prayer/song of the age

There are many facets to this story but underlying all of them is that Jesus has the power to break the chains that bind people. It is God's purpose for all but especially the least, the last, the lost to step into their freedom. But this story does not end there and with freedom comes responsibility. The healed man is not to stay with Jesus but to go and give testimony to all that God has done for him. 'Freely you have received, freely give.' (Jesus commission to his friends in Matthew 10)

Freedom is not some purposeless hedonistic state but a purpose-filled



status that signposts others to the presence and activity of the breakthrough God.

### ***Practical ideas***

Use a large ball of wool to tie the congregation together, make sure it weaves in and out so that people get that sense of being somehow 'chained' together. Think of examples of the past where chains have been broken – the abolition of slavery, the demise of the apartheid system in South Africa.

These words of Desmond Tutu may help:

*“When I talk of forgiveness I mean the belief that you can come out the other side a better person. A better person than the one being consumed by anger and hatred. Remaining in that state locks you in a state of victimhood, making you almost dependent on the perpetrator. If you can find it in yourself to forgive then you are no longer chained to the perpetrator. You can move on, and you can even help the perpetrator to become a better person too.”*

Remind people that we hold the same power as those of the past who broke such chains because like them we have the power that Jesus used to set people free from all the things that held them in chains. In the future even the Roman Empire would crumble but the gospel of Jesus Christ would remain. As we think of those things that still enslave people today pass around some children's scissors and release one another from the wool 'chain' as a sign that as we are set free in Christ so we are called to proclaim his freedom in our words and our actions in hope and confidence that this freedom is possible.

### ***Paper chain prayers***

You can buy coloured paper chains fairly cheaply from pound shops or The Works. Get people to write their prayers for people or situations where there is an absence of true freedom. Have a cross at the front with a paper chain draping over the arms and invite people to come forward and link their prayers. Perhaps when everyone has done this whoever is leading could commit all the prayers to God and then symbolically break the chain as we invite Jesus to use us in breaking the chains we have been thinking about.

### ***Illustration***

Finn is one of the principal characters in Star Wars: The Force Awakens. He is a member of the legion of stormtroopers serving the evil First Order. As he sees the brutal injustice of the regime his heart is changed and he can no longer be a part of the evil movement. He tries to run away completely but he cannot escape the pull to be a part of the Rebel Alliance and break the chains of darkness so the galaxy can be free once more. There may be suitable clips from the film that can be used depending on the age of the children in your congregation.

## **Liturgies and hymns Mark 5: 1-20**

This is where you can find hymn suggestions and liturgies for use with this week's text.

### **Call to Worship**

(based on Psalm 147)

Great is our God and abundant in power,

with wisdom beyond our understanding.

**It is God who numbers all the stars  
and gives each of them a name,  
yet bends and heals the broken hearted  
and binds up all their wounds.**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ  
the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with you all.

**And also with you.**

— written by Bruce Prewer, and posted on [Bruce Prewer's  
Homepage.](#)

### **Prayer of Adoration & Confession**

Eternal God,  
by your word you create  
and by your breath you give life.  
We worship you with joy and thanksgiving,  
praising you for the fullness  
that your presence brings to our lives,  
and our life together.

We praise you that by your word you feed us;  
we are satisfied, and there is always more.  
Your goodness is displayed in your wonderful works  
for all humanity,  
and in your perfect love.

In our humanity we are rebellious,

and sometimes follow after foolish ideas;  
going ways which lead away from life with you . . .  
And yet, when we cry out you are there,  
your word healing our inner emptiness and pain,  
embracing us, leading us in your life-giving ways.  
For your unending faithfulness, revealed to us in Christ Jesus,  
and made present to us in your Holy Spirit  
we praise you, Lord God. Amen

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### **Prayers of the People**

Great God, you wrap us round with love,  
like a mighty, gentle mother,  
and you carry us like a strong and tender father,  
setting us on our feet  
to be your free, mature and joyful daughters and sons.

Now, in our weakness, we pray to you  
because we cannot come through life's troubles unscathed;  
and, with souls and bodies stressed and strained,  
we cannot meet each other's needs without your Holy Spirit.

*Holy Spirit, come with healing power;*

*Spirit, gift of Christ, fill us with us God's love.*

Great God, we come to you with the resurrected Christ,  
who bore the weight of human flesh and blood to Calvary,  
for your love's sake;  
and even now, as conqueror of death,  
he pleads with you for all your suffering children.

*Holy Spirit, come with healing power;  
Spirit, gift of Christ, fill us with us God's love.*

We join our prayers to the prayers of Christ  
for those we know who are ill or troubled,  
and for all your suffering children who are beyond our reach of mind:  
we know that all are brought home to your heart  
in the prayers of Christ  
and in the silent intercessions of your Spirit,  
who comes from your deep heart to ours,  
and returns again to you with all our deepest longings.

*Holy Spirit, come with healing power;  
Spirit, gift of Christ, fill us with us God's love.*

Heal us and help us, comfort and strengthen us, deepen our joy.  
Let our love reflect your might tenderness  
and serve you healing gentleness.

*Holy Spirit, come with healing power;  
Spirit, gift of Christ, fill us with us God's love.*

Eternal God, there is great longing in the world;

people are desperate because of the suffering they endure.  
Earth cries out for peace; oppressed people cry for justice;  
women, men and children weep in sorrow and pain.

How can we have any hope for the world,  
unless you are with us?

Through all the mystery of pain, sorrow and human vulnerability,  
we dare to believe that you are on our side,  
that your love for us is greater than ours for you or for each other.

Call us, then, to prophesy!

By the lives we live, by our patience, by our compassion,  
by our belief in the future you will make for us,  
let your Church proclaim the great things you are doing,  
with hope for the nations of the world,  
for every person born, and every living creature.

*Holy Spirit, come with healing power;  
Spirit, gift of Christ, fill us with us God's love.*

So, Living God, let praise begin, here and now with us,  
welling up from our hearts,  
rising towards the skies,  
until praise fills the universe and joy is unconfined:  
as you delight in us and we delight in you, for evermore.

— Alan Gaunt, © 2005.

The congregational response (in italics above) can be sung to the  
melody of the Taize chant, [\*Ubi Caritas\*](#).

One of many Prayers for Pentecost posted on the [United Reformed Church](#) website—be sure to check them out. The website suggests that these prayers “*may be freely used by local churches and individuals in*

*their worship. It may not be resold in any form or used for any commercial purpose without the prior permission of the author.”*

### **Prayers of intercession**

Sung response: Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I am God

Be still... and in the quietness, the stillness, the silence... Listen... and in reverence, give thanks to God, the Creator, For the many gifts we receive from God's generous hand; God's gift of LOVE

God's gift of COMPASSION

God's gift of GENEROSITY

...And God's gift of HEALING for the sake of justice, Equality, unity, peace and well-being for all creation, As we work towards God's Kingdom on earth,

In obedience to God's calling to mission

Through the many expressions of all that Christ

Calls us to be in the unity of the Spirit.

And together we pray...

**Response:** Jesus, receive our gratitude

Sung response: I am the Lord that healeth thee  
I am the Lord that healeth thee

Gracious and Life-giving God,

We stand on your promise that you can heal our Body, Your Body the Church and your creation.

Life – giving God, whose Spirit is among us;

We come to you to find peace-for ourselves,

For our congregations and for a fragmented world. Encourage us, Lord, to be peacemakers,

And in so being, enable and encourage us

As we work to heal our broken world.

Make us and people everywhere agents of your reconciling Peace. For your church divided, often intolerant –

Send us the guiding Light of your wise Spirit,

The healing of your transforming love.

For our countries –

Suffering from the self-inflicted wounds of debt, Greed, oppression of the poor,

Racism and the genocide of indigenous people; Teach us that greatness is only ever found in justice, Generosity and compassion.

For our sweet mother earth;

Gouged by our mining,

Flogged by our industry,

Stripped of her forest clothes through un-sustainable farming, Crucified for the sake of our destructive economies:

Together we pray...

**Response:** Jesus heal us and let your transforming spirit renew our spirits

Sung response: In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust

### **Alternative Prayers of Intercession**

Who will save our Land and People?

Who will rescue us from wrong?

Christ, enough to save the sin sick

Christ, enough to heal our land...

Lord, surely you are also enough to heal our brokenness, Deeply felt within our bodies and the Body of Christ. Christ – you are the wounded Healer,

We surrender ourselves to you.

God bless our Land and People – we pray **Lord hear our prayer and heal our brokenness**



For the healing of the nations and all the faith communities, Lord we pray with one accord...

All that kills abundant living,

Let it from your body - your Bride the church - be banned; Sexuality, race, dogmas that obscure your plan.

Show us how through care and goodness,

Fear will die and hope increase.

God heal us,

**Lord hear our prayer and heal our brokenness**

May your church in loving service,

And in mission give a clear united witness and proclaim: CHRIST IS ENOUGH

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our Prayer**

*(This prayer is inspired by the Fred Kaan hymn "For the healing of the nations" and could be sung as a response during the prayer or the music to the hymn played quietly in the background)*

**Closing words**

We go in God's name And in God's peace

**To bring God's healing.**

We go in Christ's name. And in Christ's love

**To bring Christ's reconciling love.**

We go in the Spirit's name. And in the Spirit's power.

**To bring freedom to all.**

The resources have been prepared by Jet den Hollander from the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Heidi Petersen from the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, Kevin Snyman from the United Reformed Church, and Wayne Hawkins CWM Mission Secretary (Europe).

**Hymns**

Thanks be to God whose church on earth R&S 582

Beauty for Brokenness CMP 806

For the healing of the nations R&S 620

Be still and know that I am God R&S 48

The right hand of God R&S 91

## **Reflection from the Council for World Mission - Celebrating 40 years' partnership with 32 Churches in Mission (1977-2017)**

### **Theme: Healing for the broken body**

The following resources have been prepared by Jet den Hollander from the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Heidi Petersen from the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, Kevin Snyman from the United Reformed Church, and Wayne Hawkins CWM Mission Secretary (Europe).

### **Healing for the Broken Body**

Much of the Biblical story is set against the backdrop of human empires – Assyrian, Babylonian and Roman. Since 2010, CWM has articulated its own vision and mission against the background of empire. That is the coming together of economic, political, cultural, military and religious power in a system of domination that distributes the benefits from the vulnerable majority to the powerful few. Empire circumvents national boundaries and undermines cultural identities; it by-passes nation states, and co-opts or marginalises religion.

Mark 5:1-21 recalls that before Jesus' time, the region around Gerasa had been a hotbed of Jewish revolt. Emperor Vespasian ordered a devastating attack. Thousands died. Property was burned, destroyed and stolen. That memory would have been fresh and raw in the memory

of the people. Jesus meets a man near the town. Legion shows all the psychological, spiritual and physical effects of a people living under empire. He now symbolises all of Israel, suffering under and possessed by the “Legions” of Rome. Jesus demonstrates his power over empire by casting out Legion into unclean pigs. Empire meets its inevitable fate when face-to-face with the living God. It is drowned in much the same way as were the armies of Pharaoh, when God liberated the oppressed.

Some of the consequences of living in a world subject to empire are that the weak and vulnerable are further excluded; greater inequality between people's; creation and people are exploited and dominated by systems which convinces them that they are powerless to effect any change. Relationships between people's and being people and creation are undermined by empire. Indeed, as the author of Romans writes:

“For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth,” (Romans 8.22),

Creation suffers and longs for healing and wholeness.

CWM has sought to engage with understanding and resourcing member churches who seek to participate in bringing healing to a broken world. Face to Face programmes bring theological students together in exploring human trafficking and migration in Europe or conflict and division in the context of Palestine. CWM supports member churches exploring issues of

inclusion through its a “More Able Church” initiative; helping churches become advocates for the inclusion in ministry and mission, of people living with disability. Through Member Mission Programmes CWM is supporting member churches engage in building missional congregations that can have the skills and capacity to partner with God in their local communities.

However, it is not only that creation is a broken body longing for

healing, so too is the Church of Christ. In seeing the brokenness of the world we see the brokenness of the church. The renewal and restoration that the church seeks is not found in worship or superficial forms of church unity. Rather healing is found in discovering again our self-identity and becoming self-aware of who we are as faithful followers and disciples of Christ. The renewal and restoration of the Church takes place when it gives itself in faithful service. Giving itself in suffering, tears and brokenness even as Christ gave himself for the renewal of creation.