

Making Space for God

Lessons From Mark #8—The Wildman

Opening Prayer

Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess You have given me; I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough, and will desire nothing more. Amen.

Ignatius of Loyola



Arrival

Take some times to settle yourself. Invite the Lord to guide and direct your thoughts for the day. Think back over where you have been in the last four weeks. What burdens, emotions, and concerns do you carry? What are you thankful for? When have you experienced the Lord's presence? Journal your thoughts and offer these to the Lord.

Scripture—Mark 5:1-20—Read Slowly

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. ² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. ⁷ He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" ⁸ For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"

⁹ Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." ¹⁰ And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

¹¹ A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. ¹² The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." ¹³ He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

¹⁴ Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. ¹⁵ When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ¹⁶ Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. ¹⁷ Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

¹⁸ As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. ¹⁹ Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." ²⁰ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis ¹ how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Reflection

The gospel story of the Wildman of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1-20) follows a story about a horrific storm on the Sea of Galilee that drenched twelve seasick disciples of Jesus and left them terrified. "Who", they wondered, talks to the wind and it obeys.

¹ **New International Version (NIV)** Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.](http://www.bible.com)® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

² *Artwork—The Wildman, Acrylic Collage on Form Board, 11 x 6.5 inches, Steven Stuckey, 2017*

³ *Reflection on Mark 5:1-20 by Steven Stuckey 2017*

While still in a state of puzzlement, they stepped off the boat to encounter a deranged psychopath with a mental storm raging inside his brain. Symbols of death littered the landscape around him. He lived in the village graveyard, his body was covered with self inflicted cuts and bruises, and he cried out day and night in agony. As a cyclone of fury destroyed the man, he in turn sent shock waves of terror through the surrounding village. One can only imagine the shame and helplessness his family must have felt as they repeatedly tried to restrain their loved one with chains.

I am neither a psychologist nor a theologian so I will let those better qualified debate issues of mental illness and demon possession. Three things about this tale intrigue me, however. First, by putting the story of the Storm on the Sea and the Wildman of the Gerasenes side by side, Mark builds a metaphorical bridge between the ocean and the mind. Both are places of mystery, depth, beauty, and terror. Both are vast, unmeasured, boundless, and free. Both are realms where God makes Himself known. And as we stand at the shore of both, we often feel humble and helpless. It may not be an accident that many of the people Jesus chose to shape the spirituality of their generation had been fishermen first.

Secondly, whatever this story is about, it is about fear. The man is afraid, the demons are afraid, the villagers are afraid, the pigs are afraid, and we can assume the disciples were afraid. The only one who is not afraid is Jesus. He is the calm, collected center-point of the story. When we face our own mental storms of anxiety, depression, anger, or fear, we need to remind ourselves that we are not in our right minds. The voices in our heads that jabber just below the surface of consciousness pulling us in one direction or another have become a false center or false self. Our spiritual formation task in that moment is to listen to our internal voices and invite Jesus into the conversation. As we do that, we will eventually discover a place of quiet calm at the center of our souls. We will eventually experience greater integration and wholeness. We will have found our true self and Jesus, our true center.

Thirdly, wholeness is not limited to our cranium; it involves our social relationships as well. The man in the story preferred to go with Jesus and start his new life in a new location without the reputation as a deranged terrorist. But Jesus said no. He asked him to face his fears and he gave him a mission—"Go home and tell your people how much the Lord has done for you." And he did.

Jesus invites us on a similar difficult journey. Growth in self awareness, in facing our fears, in receiving mercy, and in giving our lives to others is never easy but it is the road to Life both now and in the world to come. Amen³

Readings

We are called to be in the modern world in a way that is both productive and nurturing, and we are called to monitor our inner lives, which is the secret source of the wisdom for better choices... We may choose careers, but we do not choose vocation. Vocation chooses us. To choose what chooses us is a freedom the byproduct of which will be a sense of rightness and harmony within, even if lived out in the world of conflict, absent validation, and at considerable personal cost.

Too often we remain in service to the agenda of the first half of life when the soul has already moved on to the agenda of the second. In the first half of life there is a place for ambition, for the driving powers of the ego, which compels us to overthrow our fears and to step into the world. As we have seen, the chief task of the first half of life is to build a sense of ego strength sufficient to support oneself.

James Hollis in Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life, Page 149

But whatever we are, we aren't simply rational decision-making machines. We are basically bundles of desires, beliefs, urges, and whims. At any given time, a number of desires of various sorts are competing for control of our bodies and thought processes. The dutiful me wants my body to get out of bed. The comfort-loving me wants to turn over and sleep for another few minutes—or a couple of hours, perhaps. The rational me wants to answer my email in the order it arrives. The curious me, however wants to look at the new stuff to see if there is anything titillating there, to search for opportunities to waste time and stave off useful work as long as possible. Part of me wants to be healthy and fit; another part wants a cookie or a cigar.

Rationality is a wonderful gift, but for most of us it's no more than a thin veneer on top of our bundle of disparate desires, or perhaps it's just an additional desire, comparatively weak, that competes with the rest of them.

John Perry, Stanford University, in the Art of Procrastination

It is as if each human person constitutes a committee constantly sitting to decide life's questions and the behavior desired in a given situation. This committee has many members within, each voice a particular slant—our fears, feelings, dreams, and hopes, our history and relationships, our memory, our various sub-personalities, and our reason. Hopefully the chairperson of that committee is reason, deeply guided and influenced by affectivity. Descriptively the task of a human person appears to become more and more integrated, whole, together, within that on-going meeting. All the voices need to be heard and listened to. Ultimately, at their best, people make choices that chart the direction and, over time, develop the person. Since this ability and responsibility to choose is at the heart of human motivation, the spiritual director aids another to reach a harmonious decision from this complex and fascinating committee.

Dyckman and Carroll in Inviting the Mystic, supporting the Prophet page 33

We know God as children know the ocean after a single visit to the seaside. They know the look of the sea from the shore, they know the feel of water washing their legs when paddling, they know the salt taste of the sea. But they don't know the ocean, its vast extent, its teeming life, the contours of the ocean bed, its tides, its storms and its currents. So we know God and we don't know him. But though we know God so little we can trust him, we can commit ourselves to him, we can respond to the intimations of glory and majesty with which he visits us.

Christopher Bryant in The River Within page 82

Benediction

Lord Jesus, I am a hot mess of addictions, compulsions, longings, and desires that pull me in numerous directions at once. But you have promised to make your home with and in me. You alone can stitch me back together, make me whole, and bestow your shalom upon me and your world. Like the Wildman in the story, I want to sit at your feet often this month to experience your love. And I want to be able to share your amazing love with others in my community. Amen