

## “Disruption”

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Texts: Mark 5:1-20; 2 Cor. 6:11-18

More than a carpenter . . . a revivalist/preacher/evangelist . . . a profound moralist, philosopher and great teacher . . . faith healer, miracle worker . . . yes, more than any of these things. In fact to limit Jesus to any one of these categories, or classifications is reductionist . . . it is to diminish the true magnitude of Jesus, the majestic, the anointed and only begotten Son of the Father who was sent from high heaven to earth as the perfect sacrifice and our soul's remedy for sin. We are talking about Jesus, ***our Lord and Savior, King of the universe***, the entire cosmos, who as the light of the world ended the reign of spiritual darkness—piercing what otherwise known as Satanic dominion—bringing life to those who were dead in their trespasses and sins, bound in fear, and guilt, and shame and degradation. On the cross Christ disrupted the status quo of our fallenness; but even before that cosmic alteration, he was, as we say, changing the game. That is what we are set to explore this morning. We are going to expose how Jesus accomplished that disruption—costly, pervasive and startling—and the question for you will be, quite feasibly, has the Lord of life interrupted my life. Have I embraced him as my disrupter, rescuer, and friend?

Mark 4 relates to us the astonishing teaching ministry of Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus taught through parables. Indeed, it is asserted that apart from parables, Jesus' chosen methodology, Jesus refused to teach. So, between the sharing of the parable, and the follow-up explanation (often to his disciples, in private—or apart from the wider meetings) we have as recorded in this passage Jesus' method. There is no doubt that he was an excellent teacher: **multitudes attended his presentations**—lectures? TED talks? Story-telling? However, the world has other teachers whose methodology was strikingly like that of Jesus. Socrates and Plato would come to mind, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Herodotus—all the Greek fathers of Western philosophy! Frankly, very few have more than a nodding acquaintance with these figures, available only in translation, letters and fragments. A liberal education used to include a sampling of this literature and for number of years, copies and reprints used to occupy the bedside shelf of my apartment in the 1970's—I would read them to get to sleep. Okay, pardon that aside, but my purpose is to introduce the idea that Jesus, reputedly had attained the status of being a great teacher, very skilled in the parabolic method whose repertoire exceeded the exhortatory range of John the Baptist who famously led a great revival, calling the nation of Israel to repentance even as the nation languished under Roman oppression, a tributary, or vassal state of the Roman Empire. Great teacher was the box some filed Jesus in—it was his idiom, style, his status quo.

Mark 5 is about disrupting that reputation. Mark 5 is about deliverance. Demonic deliverance, and not a psychological intervention. The unnamed man who was expelled from his fellowman, and suffering among the tombs and the dead, was demon possessed. That was his *modus operandi*, his life, his status quo and Jesus, in power and mercy, came **to find, release and deliver** this man from Satan's power—pictured as demonic captivity. It is significant, I think, that the entire church leadership at the time was in on this deliverance ministry. It was on the job training, a demonstration of deliverance. From the encounter, we learn about the territorial constraints of demonic powers. They present themselves as constrained to particular places (to wit, **they beg Jesus not to send them away out of the country** (v. 10) In real estate, we still say, “location, location.”

Therefore location is pertinent to the case. These demons were assigned to the country of Gerassa—wherever that actually was. They were part of the spiritual geography as were the pigs. And if location is pertinent, so is re-location! If our neighbor is rotten, demonically infested, it is incumbent on us either to move, relocate(!) or to renovate, cleanse, renew and purify that neighborhood. Where we live, choose to live is, a spiritual consideration. Shouldn't we consider a good neighborhood as better than, possibly, a nice one? If one is thinking of moving next door to a witches' coven, shouldn't that "condition" be considered? Right up there with a sound neighborhood church, a good school, a healthy local government. It is prudent to act advisedly in our pursuit of social mobility, advancement, relocations.

Anyway, farming and even ranching are incompatible with swine herding. Ask the Texans some of whose land is overrun with feral pigs, or large wild boar. Raising pigs is one thing, having your fields razed by pigs is quite another. One episode from Maine history describes the emergence of a large feral pig population in the Fryeburg vicinity—children couldn't walk safely to school for fear of being attacked by swine. The farmers banded together, formed a large dragnet and, armed with their rifles, systematically eliminated the whole marauding herd. Drastic, but effective.

So we have this profitable Garasene pork meat market. It was, for Jews anyway, off limits; it was illicit. Jews, *profiting off of pigs* were participating in something unlawful (religiously excluded as "unclean?") like our black market—and comparable to other economies that make up our own social setting: pornography, drug trade, prostitution and child trafficking, graft, corruption, insider trading and fraud. I am suggesting that all of these "industries" are demon-infested, yes, dark, evil and satanic. ***Jesus has come to disrupt the demonic powers everywhere, including right where we live.*** Corruption should not surprise us at all. And corruption should not dismay us either. What better way to target our mission field? When we claim that Jesus has come to set us free, we should apply that liberation to the whole range of spiritual oppression manifest in our social ills, and the endorsement of sin. When Jesus permitted the demons to infest the swine—the swine did a good service—they destroyed the demons, drowning them in the sea.

Endorsement of sin. Yes, I did say, endorsement of sin. For what is the legalization of sin but endorsement? What is the "normalization," and "desensitization" but covert endorsement?

When I first moved to the village of East Winthrop, such a pretty, picturesque and quaint little village, in the 1990's—sounds like centuries ago, right?—there were several demonic strongholds here. There was the demonic stronghold of suicide on Case Road, affecting several long-term residential families. That had to be removed, cleaned, delivered and it was. The former influence of that stronghold even affected the church. There was another stronghold of murderous spirits in the church. The prayerful intervention of a strong men's ministry at the time, bound and cast out those demons. One member of the group met the exiting spirit as he came late to meeting. Then there was the stronghold of adultery and gossip which troubled our church. Some might write it off as denominational controversies, for a struggle for control of church leadership but it was neither. It was stormy weather.

God was cleansing his church in preparation for later battles over homosexuality, fornication and same sex marriage. When the leadership of the church affirms "happiness through adultery," it is exceedingly hard to keep the commandments: **Thou shall not commit adultery.** But, by God's grace, we successfully turned that corner—*we have divine guidance and intervention.* I have assiduously avoided using names in this relation of our history, our church's

spiritual history but God in his mercy disrupted the downward spiral. Jesus and the word of God prevailed. When I first arrived, a warlock rented three houses down from the parsonage and a witches' coven met on the north shores of Lake Cobbosseecontee, tarot card and palm reading and astrology were all permissible amongst believers here. But as God would have it, all of that stuff relocated. We have gained so much ground but the need for vigilance remains high—the cultural winds are, as always adverse. And those who have been wounded during the fight are still among us, some still limping.

Mark 4 details Jesus' teaching ministry to a great seaside crowd: the parable of the sower, (taught and explained); the parable of the candle under a bushel basket; the parable of the seed (the good seed which if sown grows a crop); and the parable of the mustard seed (which is a tiny seed that produces an enormous plant). We may assume that this instruction took place in Capernaum, **but the same day, when evening had come Jesus says, Let us pass over to the other side.** So a small flotilla of ships embarked for the other side. A great storm ensues and threatens to drown the whole ministry team and some fans of Jesus. It threatens to throw them into the sea—the same sea into which the herd of swine would subsequently annihilate themselves in! Jesus, sleeping in the stern; is unalarmed so they awaken him with "Master, do you not care that we are perishing." The phrase was one of panicked hyperbole. For it is certain they had no idea of the impending fate of the demon infested swine which literally would drown! **Peace, be still,** Jesus commanded and the storm subsided—that is to say, the satanic opposition, naturally expressed, to God's advancing kingdom subsides.

**And he said to them, Why are you so fearful? How is it you have no faith?**

(Because of the hyperbole just employed—**we perish**—perhaps, hyperbole is warranted here.) **How is it that you have no faith?** Really? No faith in

what?

they really have

In Jesus' ability to keep them, protect and preserve them? Did "no faith?"

Or, was the storm an attempt by Satan to hinder, prevent, or forestall what Jesus was about to enact on the other side? Probably it is both of these things as just stated. Satan still wants to frighten us, and he also wants to hinder us by opposing our outreach, witness and evangelistic efforts?

Let's run ahead of the ministry team just launched towards the country of the Gadarenes. Now, with geographic transparency, we have to admit, that no one knows for sure where the city in this narrative was—only that it was near to the Sea of Galilee, and, perhaps, part of the region known as Decapolis, a Roman league of cities. Things are quite placid, peaceful, thriving even. The mainstay of this region is the pork business, or the swine industry. Probably bacon was a hot commodity and the buying and selling of pork was prosperous, wealth building. And that is just the way it was. Of course, traffic in pork was illicit—rather like drug trafficking, or sex trafficking, pornography which energize whole economies in most of our major cities. Marijuana sales, have been legalized, are thriving quite well in Colorado, oh, right, and in central Maine. There are lots of storefronts in Augusta, Manchester and Winthrop and there is a brisk business in drugs throughout the Kennebec Valley. You don't have to travel to New York! You can get it all right here—meth, fentanyl, designer drugs and opioids—any safe house can fill your order! It's just the way things are, right? **It is our status quo.** Used needles on the streets are certainly not restricted to San Francisco, or Los Angeles. And if addicts were demoniacs, they would be a dime a dozen.

But how things are is plainly not how things have to be. Jesus was sailing to the shores of Gadarene to shake things up, to disrupt them. When Christians came to this pagan continent;

Christ came with them to shake things up, to disrupt the status quo of Satanic dominion. Healing the wounded, delivering the oppressed, setting captives free—the world still needs the disruption that Christ brings wherever he shows up, wherever his followers, workers, evangelists, minister grace to the occasion and deliver those in bondage. The first step in this mission, this advancement of Christ's rule, His Kingdom's rule is rejection of the status quo. A rejection rooted in compassion—**they are all lost sheep without a Shepherd**—rather than disgusting villains worthy of rejection. If we see everyone as possessing an eternal soul, a soul worth saving (precious, invaluable, worthy of eternal life if cleansed, pardoned and restored), then things can be changed. If we are changed, things are changed, locations change . . . what has been, no longer has to be. What we have, our status quo, is not the only permissible outcome.

“Mules” in drug jargon are smugglers, drug dealers are privateers (like the rum runners from the days of Prohibition). When naval blockades were imposed, when there were embargoes on commodities imposed, there was no lack of daring ingenuity for getting around those barriers and restrictions. The restricted items went right over the black market and you simply had to find a supplier, or source. The nameplates on the desk may have changed, but the practice has never gone away. Yes, and the attendant thievery, fraud and deceptions—all the back room stuff—continued unabated. And where these things thrive satanic oppression is never far behind. We have simply stopped calling a spade a spade. Crime is but a stormy sea! It is meant to frighten us, but, what if it doesn't?! It is meant to deter us from our kingdom work, but what if it doesn't?!

Consider our text and the disruption caused by the deliverance of one single man—not the first and not the only Gentile evangelist because that would discount the woman at the well! Consider, one healing, one deliverance and the whole pork enterprise took a dive. The trade in illicit meat was summarily ended.

And the demoniac, now **clothed and in his right mind(!)**, toppled the whole social practice of isolation as the way to deal with the spiritually oppressed! Conversion, not coercion! Restoration, not rejection! Love, and not spite, cruelty and incarceration. Were the people grateful, glad, rejoicing at the man's liberation? No, they were not. They were fearful and very, very angry. To their mind, Jesus had ruined everything. When they lost their pigs, they imagined they had lost everything. Maybe they should have chosen to raise sheep and chickens if beef didn't fit the bill. So they asked Jesus to leave. They rejected Him and learned nothing at all. Should we expect anything else? No, again. Remember, **when they hate and despise you, that they first hated Me. Yes, they preferred darkness to light but not the man who Jesus delivered, saved, healed, restored. No, he came to the light—and that is something we must continually do.**

The twin engines of human depravity and spiritual degradation are running full tilt in our day. Some people are defeated, discouraged—sighing that darkness is inevitable, evil inescapable and they are growing fatalistic and acting as if Jesus has failed.

The populace of Gerassa, or Garadene, had grown used to the status quo—everything ran on bacon, or pork rather. Their jobs, the market, their wealth—were all swine based. When Jesus destroyed that everyone feared for their future. They feared financial disaster, amidst economic ruin and **prayed for Jesus to depart from their region.** The beneficiary of Jesus' deliverance ministry prayed that he be allowed to go with him. **But Jesus suffered him not to do so. Go home to thy friends and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for you, and had compassion on you.** (v.19) How many other healings and deliverances were

derailed by this corporate decision? How selfish and foolish they were. But, fortunately, God loves us through our folly, even through our “stupid.” We can count on that.

**Amen**