



“Repairing the Damage” by Leroy Campbell - www.info@leroycampbell.com

**A SERVICE OF HEALING (FOR THOSE SUFFERING EMOTIONAL DISTRESS,
GRIEF, DIVORCE, AND PHYSICAL AILMENTS)**

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

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Lection – Mark 5:1-18 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v.1) They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. (v. 2) And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. (v. 3) He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; (v. 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. (v. 5) Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. (v. 6) When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; (v. 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.’ (v. 8) For he had said to him, ‘Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!’ (v. 9) Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘My name is Legion; for we are many.’ (v. 10) He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. (v. 11) Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; (v. 12) and the unclean spirits begged him, ‘Send us into the swine; let us enter them.’ (v. 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. (v. 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. (v. 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. (v. 16) Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. (v. 17) Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. (v. 18) As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

Perennially, people suffer from grief, physical maladies, divorce, emotional distress, psychological aberrations, and mental diseases. Prior to the African holocaust of the transatlantic slave trade, the ancestors of African Americans practiced sophisticated indigenous religions in West Africa that fostered elaborate means of healing. African slaves transported these diverse rituals of healing from Africa to America. Folded into the Christian faith they transformed from their white slave masters, practices and prayers of healing became indirect forms of resistance to the logic of the slave system. According to Albert Raboteau, the worship rituals of these slaves “were supposed to bring the divine power tangibly into this world, so that people might be transformed, healed, and made whole.”¹

How does our obscuring of and failure to prioritize wellness impair discipleship? Ministering to the total person, churches must treat as sacred the sensitive issues that plague human beings. On average, people arrive at worship with the expectation of transformation and healing. Human vulnerability to pain, disease, tragedy, and suffering bolster the necessity for services of healing. Therefore, services of healing must take into consideration holistic wholeness, wellness, and healing. Great expectation of God’s power and possibilities of learning accompany and animate services dedicated to healing. Through prayers, exhortations, music, and more, the worshipper is moved to increase faith in and gain more awareness of God’s power to heal her or his suffering.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Mark 5:1-18

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of Interpreter

As a full-time staff member of a local Baptist congregation in Houston, I have ascertained that Christians believe in the capacity of divine healing to varying degrees. This variance in belief spans the polar views concerning healing by strict spiritual means and strict scientific means. However, many Christians also believe in the complementary nature of faith and science to affect healing. Driven by specific prayer requests, pastoral care necessities for the week, and congregational chattering, healing-centered and healing-focused services occasionally arise with a degree of spontaneity but not by accident. Clergy and worship leaders should revel in and be prepared for these occasions.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

This pericope provides a scene of Jesus, a radical member of the Jewish community, entering Gentile territory after sailing the despondent and vacillating disciples through a squall on the familiar Sea of Galilee. Germaine for rethinking liturgical responses to wellness and sickness for services of healing, Mark 5:1-18 depicts Jesus attentively and intentionally engaging a man plagued with a diversity of issues. Moments after landing in the region of Decapolis, Jesus is approached by the disturbed.

To unlock deeper meaning in the Markan iteration of this exorcism, it proves critical to treat the social nature of this episode. Emotional and psychological sicknesses, even some physical sicknesses, are rooted in interactions and relations with other people. If you trace the actions of Jesus and pay attention to the details of the author(s), this scene transcends an individualistic renewal or healing. Mark's Gospel implicates the entire community.

With the visible signs of internal disturbance of the man, Jesus asks, "What is your name?" Names are important for exorcisms, but, linguistically, it is not clear whether Jesus is addressing the demon or the man. Notice the man's paradoxical response, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (5:9). The man is occupied by a single plurality, several-in-one. Jesus inquires about his identity, "who he is," but he names his problem, "what he has." The employment of the word "Legion" is not to be glossed over. First-century readers and students of Greco-Roman society sense the hint. Legion is a Roman reference to military units, generally referring to a battalion of 2,048 soldiers. Historically, this unnamed man lives in a region marked by the thick violence of the Roman army. The 10th Legion had occupied this space since 6 CE. Perhaps the name legion alludes to the imperial occupation of this person. His internal reality mirrors his contextual reality.

Depending on the age of the man, which remains obscure in this Markan narrative, the man's purview of his community is marked by violence against and the destruction of *the others*. Franz Fanon terms this reactionary psychosis—the internalization of the realities we witness around us. His *demon* looks like the internalization of his local world of violence, which is substantiated by the violence he inflicts on himself.

Still with the capacity for breath, bodily mobility, and relative cogency of thought, the so-called demoniac retreats to and tabernacles in the tombs of the mountains among the dead. Rene Girard refers to this so-called demoniac as simultaneously dead and alive. The man's behavior is recorded to be self-mutilating and self-destructive. However, as demonstrated in the text, encounters with Jesus can prevent us from mirroring the sickness embedded in our world. Dominant readings of this text largely focus on the multiplicity of issues plaguing the demoniac and obscure the behavioral symptoms of the community attempting to chain him. In Mark 5:10, the Legion petitions Jesus not to send them out of the region, which is unique to Mark's account. The Markan text offers an image of a community intoxicated by its own dysfunction and unwilling to detach from the familiarity it breeds.

The crowd approaches the man sitting in a posture of self-control, but they are alarmed with fear. The formerly troubled individual sits before them in the very condition they endeavored to materialize through chaining him, but they respond in dissatisfaction. When he was deranged they were not afraid, but in his wholeness, they are gripped by fear. Although marginalized in

and maligned by the community, I propose this *demonized* person serves the insincere interests of the community.

The defective behavior of this Gerasene man permits the remainder of the residents to feel better about themselves. By using him as the scapegoat, to use another phrase of Girard, the citizens are able to create a superficial moral high ground by having someone to blame and highlight.² Try not to gloss over the need of people of the ancient, and to some degree those in our contemporary worlds, to separate people and other realities into categories. The ancient worldview of the biblical Jews used binaries (categories) of clean and unclean, which philosophically connoted order and disorder/accepted and unaccepted. He is an unclean spirit, living among dead things (tombs) and among swine. He personifies the life that is underneath the standards of community. However, they are not afraid to handle him until he transgresses their categorizations.

The community that encases him and feeds his dysfunction responds with an acute case of collective metathesiophobia—fear of change. Unfortunately, we often become severely attached to disorder, because we perceive it to be well-ordered. In fact, this is what psychologists call “cyclical pathology.” The people of the town continually chain him. They behave like sick people whose actions foster rather than decrease the disease in the person. His humanity is compromised by chains and fetters imposed on him by external persons and parties. When Jesus heals him, this man, cured of his pathologies and emancipated from the image of the community, no longer fits their categories.

Acquiescing to the request of Legion, Jesus banishes Legion to a herd of swine in the region. While some translations depict the herd charging down a slope into the sea, the Greek more closely means down and over a cliff rather than a slope. The text offers the reader the image of a herd of pigs charging over a cliff and falling into the sea, which claimed countless lives in crowd violence in the ancient world.

Stoning was the chief form of publicly sanctioned violence. In the ancient world, the community would form an impenetrable ring around the person and throw stones at him while progressively moving him to the edge of the cliff until the person plunged to her death—a form of lynching.³ Jesus reverses the narrative by saving the scapegoat from his presumed fate and exorcises the demonic out of the entire region.

Jesus humanizes and heals the local bad guy, the outsider, the one who is looked down upon. Unlike most Markan miracles, Jesus does not call for the messianic secret—the directive to hold one’s experience and learning of Jesus in silence. Conversely, the healed man is encouraged to remain in this region and divulge the particulars of this encounter. Jesus prompts him to talk about the old and new reality that creates the tension and distinguishes him from his community. As Jesus leaves at the aggressive excitement of the capitalistic crowd, the renewed man petitions to depart with Jesus. Jesus instructs him to stay—to return to his home and family. Likewise, he can use the testimony of his wounds to heal his world.

Challenge

Like the Garasene of the text, people often live oblivious to the extent and depths of their conditions, particularly emotional and mental concerns. A person easily loses herself to the problems and conditions that lurk around and within her worlds (home, neighborhood, and the wider society). Nonetheless, as the text shows, Jesus humanizes the local bad guy. Jesus humanizes those lost to themselves. The American situation and the logic of white supremacy, which materializes in domestic terrorism, political sterilization, and social marginalization, induce the unchecked psychological trauma and emotional anguish of black persons—the disease of American capitalistic living.

After centuries of seasoning and dehumanization, significant segments of black communities continue to ratify and enact the stereotypes mapped onto their bodies. The career and never-ending cause of disciples of Jesus should be to humanize the demonized, disenfranchised, and destitute. We are called to walk with people along the road to wholeness and stand with them as they reenter community.

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details of this passage include:

Sounds: Wailing; grunts of pain; the voice of Jesus; swine toppling over a cliff;

Sights: A lacerated and disheveled demoniac; townspeople attempting to chain the demoniac; graveyard/tombs; contorted faces of the crowd; and

Smells: The scent of livestock; the odor of the unhygienic demoniac; the marine smell of the disciples and Jesus after facing the storm at sea.

III. Other Sermonic Suggestions

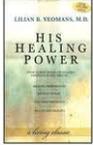
Books



Girard, René. The Scapegoat, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).



Painter, John. Mark's Gospel: Worlds in Conflict (New York: Routledge, 1997).



Yeomans, Lillian. His Healing Power: Four Classic Books on Healing Complete in One Volume (Tulsa: Harrison House, 2003).

Quotes

- The biggest danger, that of losing oneself, can pass off in the world as quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc., is bound to be noticed.
—Soren Kierkegaard. Sickness Unto Death, 2008, p. 26.
- The troublesome quality of black life in slavery was psychologically disturbing. This does not suggest a condition of neurosis; rather the indication is that one's psychological well-being was continually challenged by constant confrontations with the insanity of slavery. The assaults upon human dignity by the slavocracy were immense and could leave their victims reaching for sane solutions within an insane world.
—David Goatley, "Godforsakenness in African American Spirituals," in Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue: Black Theology in the Slave Narratives. ed. Dwight Hopkins and George Cummings (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 142.
- Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction....The chain reaction of evil—hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars—must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.
—Martin Luther King, Jr., Strength to Love, 1963.

Documentary

See the documentary "The Gospel of Healing: Black Churches Respond to HIV/AIDS." Online location: <http://thegospelofhealing.com/>

Notes

1. Albert J. Raboteau. Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 45.
2. Rene Girard. The Scapegoat, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
3. Andrew William Kintott. Violence in Republican Rome (New York: Oxford Press, 1999), 7.