

Manna Moments

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

Scripture Mark 5:1-20

[Jesus and his disciples] came to the other side of the sea [of Galilee], to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; 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. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; 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." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." 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.

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. 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. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. 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." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Devotional

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I distinctly remember the tan and blue tile of big open atrium of Frankfort Middle School and the rectangular wooden benches that were scattered around it. On my first day of 7th grade, the place was imposing and cold, filled with unfamiliar faces. My parents were newly ordained and starting their first calls in Frankfort, IN. I was in a new school as I had been every year for the past 4 years. What new ways would these classmates find to ostracize me? Would it be my glasses? My clothes? My southern accent? How would my presence upset the social order this time? I felt resigned to my fate as the outsider.

Cont.



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After a lonely lunch in the cafeteria that day, I found my way to a bench in the atrium to wait out the rest of the period. That's where Heather found me. She sat down with me and drew me into conversation. I think she had a deck of cards or some kind of game we played as we talked – I don't remember what it was – I just remember feeling relief and joy that someone took the time to get to know me and let me get to know her. I wasn't a strange new kid, I was just someone she hadn't met yet.

As someone who moved a lot during my school years, I've always wondered how it feels to really fit in somewhere; what it's like to fully belong to a place or a community. Being new in town always meant repeating the story of my life over and over, inadvertently stepping on toes, having to learn new customs, and being thought an idiot for not knowing some bit of local history that "everyone" is supposed to know.

I was tired of it.

Perhaps the man with the unclean spirit was tired of being the odd one out, living as he did on the literal outskirts of town with the Legion within him scaring away most human contact. Maybe the swine herders, cut off from Jewish society because of their profession, knew the tug that pulls your gut and heart when you have to watch everyone else get together without you. I imagine they, too, were resigned to their fate as outsiders. Perhaps Jesus knew what it was like to be constantly on your guard, knowing your mere presence will upset the way things have always been done.

Far from being resigned to his fate as an outsider, Jesus became the one who moved on the margins of society and welcomed those who lived there as beloved people of God. He cast out their demons. He healed their diseases. He broke the social barriers that tried to separate him from them. And when those who had been marginalized told their communities what God had done for them, the community folks either asked Jesus to go away or were amazed to see God at work.

As an established congregation in our community, we are more likely to find ourselves in the position of those community folks than we are to find ourselves in a position on the margins. How will we respond when those on the margins of our society come to us, bearing witness to God at work in their lives?

I hope we choose to be amazed.

Prayer or Thought of the Day

Who has been "Heather" to you when you were new in a community? Make a list of things that have made you feel welcome in a new place or among new people. What might you do to be a welcoming presence for someone who is new in our community?

Notes: