

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(March 13, 2016)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Good News!

Go Home

(Mark 5:1-20)

Study #3

Introduction: Shifted paradigm...

Last weekend, a new family was born. My daughter, Erin, married Kody Johnson. Thus, the birth of this new family as they each said their “*I do’s*” and their “*I will’s*,” and as I get used to hearing about some person named Erin Johnston.

Of course, the wedding planning was close to overwhelming (not that I, personally, did all that much; on the other hand, Kathy...). But the day of the wedding was wonderful and it is our prayer that their marriage will be delightful in every way.

One thing is certain. Their marriage will change everything. Marriage is supposed to change everything.

In what has been for several years one of my favorite books on marriage, The Mystery of Marriage, author Mike Mason writes,

“A marriage, or a marriage partner, may be compared to a great tree growing right up through the center of one’s living room.

“It is just *there*, and it is huge, and everything has been built around it, and wherever one happens to be going—to the fridge, to bed, to the bathroom, or out the front door—the tree has to be taken into account. It cannot be gone through; it must respectfully be gone around.

“True, it could be chopped down, but not without tearing the house apart. And certainly it is beautiful, unique, exotic; but also, let’s face it, it is at times an enormous inconvenience.”

Fiercely individualistic individuals who have been thinking individually are now called to think as a couple. Life plans are no longer made independently, but together.

Getting married prompts what has come to be called a “paradigm shift.” Erin and Kody are now experiencing the on-going paradigm shift of marriage.

Paradigm shifts may be prompted by marriage. Or, they may come through scientific discoveries or reversals in fortune (either up or down).

But when our worlds are rocked, when we no longer look at the world the way we always have, our paradigm has shifted.

This morning we are going to look at events that shifted the paradigms of Jesus’ first disciples. I believe that if we will listen closely today, the Lord just might shift our own paradigms through these stories.

Once, after telling some parables, Jesus dismissed the crowds, turned to His disciples and said, **[4:35] “Let us go over to the other side.”**

They sailed from the northwest to the southeast end of the lake, taking them from the region of Galilee - a Jewish area - to a region known as the Decapolis, a place largely inhabited by Gentiles. While sailing, a storm blew up, at night, on the Sea of Galilee.

Stilling a Storm on the Sea (4:35-41)

A Storm on the Sea! (v. 37)

[37] And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up.

Fierce storms can and do descend suddenly on the Sea of Galilee. They sweep down from the surrounding hills and can instantly turn a placid lake violent. Watch Jesus.

Jesus Sleeps (v. 38b)

[38a] Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion

With very little experience on open water, I would be terrified in a big storm on a big lake. Jesus wasn't terrified. He was either totally exhausted or was simply at perfect peace. He slept.

The disciples, though, were definitely NOT asleep. They had been battling Sea of Galilee-storms for years, but this one was more than they could handle. So...

Disciples Panic! (vv. 38b)

[38b]...they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

These are professional fishermen crying out for help in the middle of a squall to their rabbi, a carpenter from Nazareth.

Jesus Speaks (vv. 39-40)

To the sea (v. 39)

[39] And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.

One of my commentaries says, "When the sea heard the voice of her Master she calmed down." The Sea of Galilee became like glass.

Then, Jesus turned to His twelve disciples.

To the disciples (v. 40)

[40] And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?"

And with that miracle and that rebuke, the worlds of the disciples changed. Their paradigms shifted. They saw what they had not seen before.

Paradigm Shifted (v. 41)

[41] They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

There was a certain fear when the waves were breaking across the bow. But this is now a different kind of fear. Post-storm, they fear because they see that Jesus was more than a man of God, more than a prophet, and more than a good, moral teacher.

Someone who can still a raging storm is wholly other than what they had thought they were dealing with.

Now they see that He is sovereign over nature - and that discovery was a game changer. Jesus has blown apart the boxes in which they had placed Him and their paradigms have shifted.

And it is true that calming a raging sea is impressive. But the disciples will be even more impressed, and so will others, and so will we be, when Jesus turns His attention to a raging soul.

With calmed waters outside and jittery disciples inside, the boat landed on the southeast shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Mark tells us that they have landed in the region of the Gerasenes, probably near a town called Gersa.¹

Stilling a Storm in a Soul (5:1-20)

¹ It seems best to understand the location being a town called Gersa, located on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

An Encounter on Foreign Soil (vv. 1-2)

[1] They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. [2] When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him

Now Jesus dealt with people who were oppressed by the devil on a number of occasions.

- He cast a demon out of a man in a synagogue (Mark 1:23-28);
- There were several occasions when He healed (or “cleansed”) many who were demon-possessed at one gathering;²
- He gave His disciples authority to cast out demons (Mark 3:15).

And there were other times, too, when Jesus had personal confrontations with the devil, like when He Himself was tempted in the wilderness (Mark 1:13).

Throughout, the Bible assumes the existence of a real, personal devil as much as it assumes the existence of angels.

But it is not true that the Bible attributes all illnesses to demon activity. The Bible teaches that sometimes people suffer sickness because of demons and sometimes bodies simply break down. Sometimes, insanity is attributed to demons and sometimes minds break down.

But in this case, there is no question. The pitiful man who approached Jesus was possessed by demons. And he had been possessed for a very long time.

How he came to be this condition is anybody’s guess. We may wonder if he was involved in some gross sin that opened the way for demonic activity? Or if he was deeply involved in occult practices? Or if he was simply the hapless victim of evil spirits?

We are not told.

² This happened on the same night He healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever; Mark 1:32.

Nor does Jesus seem interested in finding out. The Lord never asks about his past lifestyle choices, or his family of origin.

But when we are brought into this story, we meet a man who lives in a way no one would choose. He is ruled by a will not his own.

And as Jesus got out of the boat He saw a human mess, a stark created-in-the-image-of-God tragedy standing right in front of Him.

He was a citizen of the closest city (Gersa), but didn’t live in the city. There was an animal wildness about him. Everything about him reeked of uncleanness.

A Demonic Legion vs. Jesus = No Contest (vv. 3-13)

The demons’ cruelty (vv. 3-5)

[3] and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; [4] because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. [5] Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones.

The demon-possessed man was afflicted with terrible physical strength.

He was self-destructive, gashing himself with stones. And, at times, neighbors and fellow citizens had tied him up with chains. Every time they chained him - to protect themselves or to protect him - demonically supernatural strength would course through his body and he would break the chains.³

Now, the man (who remains nameless throughout) has become too wild. No one approaches him anymore, and he is left alone to roam among the tombs and out in the deserted areas like a wild beast.

³ Extraordinary physical strength is a phenomenon that is mentioned frequently in the literature that addresses demon possession.

Notice. Jesus didn't go searching for him. The demoniac approached Jesus. Using the vocal chords of the man, the demon spoke.

The demons' fear (vv. 7-8)

[6] Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; [7] and shouting with a loud voice, he said, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!"

The speaking demon was obviously very frightened. It recognized who it was dealing with. It knew Jesus to be the Son of God.⁴

And, using the body of the possessed man, it fell down in front of Jesus, begging Him for leniency. (That's rich. The demon had been tormenting the man for years and begs Jesus to not be tormented...)

Mark ushers us into the scene as the action is progressing. Jesus had been commanding the spirit to leave. **[8] For He had been saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!"** But this demon horde was stubborn. So, Jesus demanded an answer to a question from the demon that He never does ask of the man.

The demons' destiny (vv. 9-10)

The demons identified (v. 9)

[9] And He was asking him, "What is your name?" And he said to Him, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

When Jesus directed the demon to give his name⁵, the spokesman responded with "**Legion**" because there were actually many, many demons afflicting this man.⁶

Like a Roman military unit, the demons formed a unit that was cruel, destructive, and strong.

But, these demons have met their match in Jesus. They knew they were done and begged Jesus for a favor.

The demons beg (v. 10)

[10] And he began to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country.

And for reasons not made clear here, Jesus granted to their request, allowing them to continue their dirty work in the region of the Gerasenes.

Jesus sets the man free! (vv. 11-13)

The unclean demons requested permission to leave the man and enter into some pigs (Swine were "unclean" from the perspective of a Jew. Moses' Law listed pigs among the animals that Jews were not allowed to eat.)⁷

Jesus gave them permission, and the rest makes for very interesting reading.

[13]...And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea.

Not surprisingly, news of what had happened spread quickly. **Good Riddance to Jesus (?) (vv. 14-17)**

Good News! (vv. 14-15)

⁴ Isn't it interesting that the disciples on the boat wondered, "*Who is this Guy?*" while the demon immediately knew Who it was dealing with.

⁵ Robert Trench suggests that Jesus was asking the man his name, not the demon. I think that this is unlikely.

⁶ The number of soldiers in a Roman legion varied, so we can't give a firm number to this man's demons. Generally, a legion consisted of from five to six thousand soldiers. It may be that he was host to multiple thousands of demons.

⁷ The fact that the swine were present clues us in to the fact that this land was mostly Gentile-ish, since pigs are considered unclean animals by the Jews.

[14] Their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and in the country. And the people came to see what it was that had happened.

So, what would the citizens of the city of Gersa have seen when they arrived on this scene?

Well, they would have first gazed out at the south end of the Sea of Galilee and seen a bay of pigs (sorry...) There were a couple thousand dead pigs floating in the water!

Then, they would have looked away from the sea to where Jesus was and would have been greeted by another sight.

[15a] They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down,⁸ clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the "legion"

Now, the demoniac who had been ravaging the countryside for years, making passage through the area unsafe for humans, screaming at the top of his lungs as he ran naked through the tombs, is seated at the feet of Jesus, fully clothed and perfectly sane.

And it is when they see THIS that the Bible tells us, **[15b] and they became frightened."**

They *were not* frightened when they saw two thousand drowned pigs in the Sea of Galilee, the pigs having been driven to the madness of rushing over a cliff by demons. They *were* frightened when they saw the demoniac un-demonized!

You and I see this as great news. It's fantastic! But the people who had come to see didn't see it that way. They saw the good news of this man's deliverance as bad news.

⁸ This is significant. We are to understand that he is listening to what Jesus had to say. He has adopted the posture of a disciple.

Bad News? (vv. 16-17)

[16] Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine. [17] And they began to implore Him [i.e. - Jesus] to leave their region.⁹

They had seen this demoniac break chains. Now, somehow, this Jesus has tamed him - so they figured that Jesus must be really dangerous.

They had been successful pig farmers. Now, a sizable herd is gone, no doubt due, somehow, to this Jesus, to their own great financial loss.

And these Gerasenes wanted nothing to do with Jesus. So, they begged Him to leave them be.

How ironic.

Evidently the Decapolis area was a nice place for demons since the demons asked permission to remain there. But the citizens of Decapolis wanted Jesus, the holy Son of God, gone!¹⁰

Well, Jesus listened to their request - and He took their request seriously. He walked away from the Gentile crowd and prepared to cross the Sea of Galilee in the boat with His disciples to return to the Jewish area around Capernaum.

⁹ Notice that when Jesus cast demons out of the man, a heroic, kind and wonderful work, the citizens of that region asked Him to leave the country. Hmm... Don't expect that serving Jesus today will necessarily result in popularity. It may lead to rejection. That may be what is involved in following Jesus. Let's just remember that nothing - NOTHING! - compares to the joy of being God's agent in touching another life.

¹⁰ At least one commentator suggests that their fear stemmed from their financial loss, wondering what else Jesus might do to jeopardize their material possessions if He were allowed to stay.

But, there was one Gerasene who broke with the crowd. One man wasn't thinking "Good riddance!" as Jesus got ready to sail away.

The former demoniac desperately didn't want to be separated from Jesus. If Jesus was leaving, he wanted to leave, too.

A Home Assignment (vv. 18-20)

Pleading for a place in the boat (v. 18)

[18] As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him.

For my money, this is an incredibly touching scene. This man is shamelessly begging Jesus for the privilege of sailing with Him. And he may have wanted to go with Jesus for all kinds of great reasons.

He might have been afraid:

- that in Jesus' absence, the demons would return;
- of the unfriendly citizens of Gersa giving him a hard time;
- of the influences that might have resulted in his being demonized in the first place tempting him again?

Or maybe it was love that prompted him to want to leave with Jesus. After all, Jesus had given him his mind, his soul, and his life back.

For any or all of these reasons, who can blame him for wanting to accompany Jesus? He had met Jesus as a wreck, and he was now whole. And everything points to the wisdom of allowing him to accompany Jesus and the twelve in the boat.

Make him the thirteenth apostle. They'll need one, eventually, anyway. Let him come along. He *wanted to* drop everything and follow Jesus - and he didn't even have all that much to drop.

So, what will Jesus do?

If Hollywood was writing a script to accompany this story, the scene would conclude with Jesus welcoming the man with open arms,

saying, "You bet, big fella. Hop on in. Join me. There's room for you in My boat. Come, sail with Me."

But that is not what Jesus says. There is no hint that what the man was asking was a bad request. But Jesus said, "No."

That's right. The Lord refused his request. "No, you may not come with Me."

"No, you can't come with Me." (v. 19)

[19] And He did not let him, but He said to him, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you."

What Jesus is doing here is commissioning the former demoniac as the first Apostle to the Gentiles of the Decapolis.

And by doing *that* Jesus gave this man a terrifically challenging assignment. He gave him a home assignment. And this man carried out his mission beautifully.

The apostle to the Decapolis (v. 20)

I submit that *home* would have been the hardest place of all for him to go.

After all, the people of Gersa knew all about him. They had watched him run through the tombs like a wild man for years. They had chained him up and seen him rip up the chains.

He had a horrible reputation. Nobody thought much of him. The only credibility he has are the clothes on his formerly naked body.

But Jesus sent him home to tell others **[19]... "what great things the Lord has done"** for him and **"how He had mercy"** on him.

Well, Jesus told him to go - and go he did!

As Jesus sailed away across the Sea of Galilee, having stayed in the region just a few hours, the record of this encounter ends with this:

[20] And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Conclusion:

The paradigms of the disciples were shifted when the storm was stilled on the sea. Now there has been a shift in the paradigms of the people of Decapolis who see this former demoniac talking about Jesus all the time.

And it may be that God wants to shift your paradigm and mine today as we look at what may have just become one of your favorite Gospel stories (it has long been one of mine).

So many Gospel threads come together in this story. As we conclude, I'll highlight four of the more prominent strands.

- **God helps those who mess themselves up (He calls us to help, too)**

Each one of us here today knows what it is to mess up. I sure do. And we know people who find themselves in all kinds of messes. Life is messy and it's easy to mess up and to get messed up.

Our friends may have done it to themselves, may have gotten messed up by someone else, or may have been messed up by life.

Watch how Jesus deals with this demoniac. He rescues him. Period.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost messes we all are. He didn't make this man's rescue an inquisition into his past. He didn't force promises for the future. He simply rescued him.

In relating this story, here is what I'm saying. Every one of us - no exceptions - is as lost as this man was lost. Every one of us is as needy for what only Jesus can provide as this man. Every one of us is every bit as loved by Jesus as this man.

And you and I who are followers of Jesus are called to be as loving toward our needy friends as Jesus has been to us.

- **Jesus changes lives (He still does)**

We say this all the time and we see this all the time. A story like this one brings it all home: Jesus changes lives.

On this day, we have watched Him transform a man who was trapped in a demon-possessed prison of insanity into a picture of peace who became possessed by a transcendent mission from God.

I have seen Jesus change hoarders into givers, alcoholics into sober men and women, and lust-filled people into models of purity.

He'll change a narcissist into someone who loves sacrificially and He'll change a self-centered egotist into a big-hearted, compassionate missionary who serves people God loves.

Jesus has been changing lives for two thousand years. He still changes lives. He has and will continue to change yours. He will change the lives of those you love. Ask Him to do that. Pray that He will do what only He can do. Beg Him to change the eternal destinies and the lives of the people you know and love.

- **Yes, Jesus can use you (Never doubt it!)**

Now, let's look at the man Jesus left behind to serve as His first witness to the Decapolis. His choice was a very recently redeemed, formerly naked, insane, demoniac.

And we are sometimes tempted to think, "*God would (or could) never use someone like me to make a difference.*" Really. He used the Gerasene demoniac and He won't/can't use you.

God used the Apostle Paul - murderer of Christians. He used the Apostle Peter - denier of Jesus. There is nothing in your past that would disqualify you from being in His service.¹¹

One of the great truths of Christianity is that, in Jesus, there are no “ministry nobodies.” In Jesus, everybody is a ministry somebody.

Jesus saved you and Jesus will use you to bless others. He will not look at you and declare, “*Unclean. Unfit for use. On the shelf for good.*” He will use you while changing you from the inside out.

- **Redeemed to share with others (Good News is for sharing!)**

The last thing I’ll mention that stands out from the story of the Gerasene demoniac has to do with the life Jesus saved you and me to live.¹²

We all have our assignments from God and we are all given contexts in which to carry out those assignments.

Some - and our church financially supports some of these - travel to remote areas and foreign lands to take the message of Jesus to people who would otherwise not hear.

And then there are people like me and you who are given the same assignment Jesus gave to the former demoniac - “*Go home.*”

¹¹ The whole scene is reminiscent of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1. In describing that church, he wrote that it was made up of [26]...*not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; [27] but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, [28] and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, [29] so that no man may boast before God.*

¹² For him, following Jesus involved doing something very hard (staying home) and not doing the very thing he wished to do (climb in the boat with Jesus). He was saved to live the life Jesus chose for Him. And that is what he did. Today, the former demoniac serves as our example. We obey Jesus - and then find LIFE in the obeying.

If you *have not* been given the assignment to go to remote areas to serve Jesus, you *have* been given the home assignment. You are to let your light shine at home, at work, at school.

How about all of us, right now, agreeing to pray that God would open our hearts to be willing to share the love of Jesus, that He would open doors of opportunity, and that He would give us grace to open our mouths to speak in just the right way at just the right time?

How about all of us deciding, today, who we’ll invite over to dinner, take out for coffee, or otherwise hang with so that we can bring our friend to Jesus?

How about every one of us here who has tasted the amazing grace of God through faith in Jesus leaving this place and going “***to [our] people and [reporting] to them what great things the Lord has done for [us], and how He had mercy on [us]***”?