

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Following Where Jesus Leads

(Studies in the Gospel of Mark)

Giving Jesus His Due

(Mark 4:35--5:20)

Study #3

Introduction: Fighting words...

There are words we could all think of that are so insulting, so offensive that we simply agree to not use them. They are out of bounds, totally inappropriate.

A list of these words - and I won't list them - would include the lewd, the vulgar and the obscene, the slanderous, and highly charged name-calling.

These are words, which, if used especially in certain contexts, would incite a fight. That's why we call them "fighting words".

One word that many people today see as a "fighting word" shows up repeatedly in our Bibles. It's a word that polarizes, divides, infuriates, and frustrates. And embracing what this word calls us to do is central to following Jesus.

This morning, we're turning to one of my favorite passages in Mark's Gospel to continue with a series of studies that is leading to Easter, "*Following Where Jesus Leads*".

We're starting today at the end of Mark, chapter 4. And, by this point, Mark has covered a lot of ground.

Review of Mark's Gospel to this point...

He has recorded Jesus' baptism and temptation in the wilderness, the beginning of His ministry and the calling of a few disciples. He's told us about Jesus' healings and exorcisms and of His choice of twelve of His followers to be apostles.

One day, after Jesus had finished telling some stories/parables, He dismissed the crowds who were listening, turned to His twelve disciples and said, **[4:35] "Let us go over to the other side."**

With that, they launched out on to the Sea of Galilee to sail overnight from the northwest side of the lake to the southeast side.

That line of travel took them from the region of Galilee, in Israel, to a non-Jewish land known as the Decapolis.

Before getting to today's main story - something that happened on land - we need to see what happened on the water.

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

Jesus Naps While a Storm Rages (vv. 37-38a)

A storm arose 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 regularly get stirred up on the Sea of Galilee. Weather systems sweep down from the hills that surround the lake and turn it into a tempest.

This storm was quite the tempest, but Jesus was oblivious.

Jesus sleeps (v. 38b)

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

This is a picture of either total exhaustion or total peace of mind. I can't imagine sleeping during a violent storm on water.

But, if Jesus slept, the disciples didn't. They had been battling Sea of Galilee storms all their lives, but this one was more than they could handle.

Jesus' Sea-Hardened Disciples Panic (vv. 38b)

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

And, yes, it's ironic that fishermen who have worked this lake for years cry out for help to a carpenter from Nazareth.

But their cries for help were better placed than they could have dreamed. They may have just been wanting Jesus to pick up a bucket and help bail water. What He did was more than they ever expected.

Jesus' Words to HIS Sea; HIS Disciples (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.

Then, Jesus spoke to the disciples.

To the disciples (v. 40)

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

With the calming of the sea, just like that, their worlds changed. Their paradigms shifted. They saw what they had not seen before.

Jesus Explodes His Disciples' Boxes (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?"¹

These twelve grown men had been afraid of the storm on the Sea, but are now "***very much afraid***" because they were beginning to see that this Jesus they were following was more than a man of God, more than a prophet, more than a miracle-worker.

Someone who had authority over a storm on the sea, someone to whom the sea *submitted* (that - *submit* - is today's "fighting word") was wholly other than who they had thought they were dealing with.

This new discovery was a game changer. Jesus has blown apart the box in which they had placed Him. And if they thought that calming a raging sea was impressive, they ain't seen nothing yet.

The disciples landed the fishing boat in The Decapolis.²

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

Accosted 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

In our New Testaments, we often read about people who were tormented by demons (called here "***an unclean spirit***")³ and Jesus Himself dealt with them on a number of occasions.

- He cast a demon out of a man in a synagogue (Mark 1:23-28);

¹ The Greek word here (*upakouw*) means "to obey, be subject to".

² It seems best to understand the location being a town called Gersa, located on the (south?) eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

³ The New Testament assumes the existence of a spiritual realm populated by enemies (Satan, the devil, others opposed to God) and by those aligned with God.

- He healed many who were demon-possessed on the same night He healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Mark 1:32);
- He gave His disciples authority to cast out demons (Mark 3:15).

So, the Bible does affirm that demons exist and that they can harm people. But the Bible does not attribute all illnesses to demons.

Sometimes, physical and mental illness is caused by demons and sometimes it is not. In this case, there is no question. This pitiful man who approached Jesus had been "demonized"⁴ for a long time.

We aren't told how he came to be in this condition, nor does Jesus seem interested in finding out. He never asks about the man's lifestyle choices or his family of origin.⁵

Jesus got out of the boat and saw a human mess, a created-in-the-image-of-God tragedy running toward Him.

There was an animal wildness about him. Everything about him reeked of uncleanness and terrible, self-destructive physical strength.

Authority Over Demonic Power (vv. 3b-16)

The demons' cruelty (vv. 3b-5)

[3b]...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.⁶ [5] Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones.

⁴ This is the literal sense of how the condition is described, rather than "possessed."

⁵ Was he involved in some gross sin that opened the way for demonic activity? Was he deeply involved in the occult practices of the region? Was he simply the hapless victim of evil spirits? We don't know.

⁶ Immense physical strength is mentioned frequently in the literature that addresses demon possession.

By the time we enter this scene, this man had been abandoned. No one approached him anymore. He was left alone to roam the Gerasene cemeteries.

Jesus didn't go searching for this man. It's the other way around. The man with the demon came running up to Jesus.

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 unclean spirit knew exactly who Jesus was - and was terrified because of it.⁷

Then, for another irony, the unclean spirit threw the human body in which he dwelt down in front of Jesus - and begged for mercy.

Jesus barked out a command - ***[8] ..."Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!"***

But this spirit was stubborn, so Jesus demanded an answer to a question He never asks of the human host.

The demons are cast out with a word!

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."

Now, the number of soldiers in a Roman legion varied, so we can't give a firm number as to how many demons tormented this man.

⁷ Fascinating. The disciples wondered, "*Who is this Guy?*" while the demon immediately knew Jesus' identity.

But, generally, a legion consisted of from five to six thousand soldiers. So, it may be that this man was host to multiple thousands of unclean spirits.

But they have met their match in Jesus. They know it and the spokes-demon begged, again, for mercy.

The demons beg (v. 10)

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

For some reason, Jesus granted this request and allowed them to continue to do their dirty work in the same region - which leads to the next, very bizarre, scene.

Jesus sets the man free - that is the point (vv. 11-13)

[11] Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain.⁸ [12] The demons implored Him, saying, "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them." [13] Jesus gave them permission. 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.

Yep. The unclean spirits requested permission from Jesus to leave the man and enter the unclean pigs. Jesus allowed it and the demon-possessed pigs destroyed themselves.

On our way to the climactic point of this whole episode, let's just pause and review what Mark has shown us so far, especially as it relates to authority and submission.

- Jesus had authority over the water in the Sea of Galilee. He told it, ***"Hush, be still."*** The sea submitted to Him.

⁸ The fact that the swine were present lets us know that this was Gentile territory, since pigs were and are considered unclean animals by the Jews. Moses' Law prohibits Jews from eating pork, but a Jew who has become a Christian Jew could / can eat pork if he / she wants to. (See Acts 10-11)

- Jesus had authority over a Legion's worth of unclean spirits that had been tormenting a man and they submitted to His authority and left the man alone.
- Jesus had authority over fevers, diseases, leprosy, and paralysis - all of which submitted to His authority to heal.

Large segments of our culture don't appreciate the idea of submission. "Submit" is a fighting word. And that's understandable because of the way authority is so often abused in human relationships.

Wives who don't experience the love of a husband laying down his life for her may be tempted to not offer submission to him. (And notice how similar *"her submission to him"* and *"laying down his life for her"* really are) (Ephesians 5)

People who make up a church - like this one - may balk at the idea of mutual submission out of fear of being taken advantage of. (also Ephesians 5)

And people who believe in Jesus may not eagerly submit to Him because they've never experienced good, loving authority.

I've spent the better part of my life submitting - imperfectly, of course - to Jesus. And I happily urge everyone who believes in Jesus to fully submit to Him.

I do so, not only because He's the ultimate Authority. I urge you to submit to Jesus because He's good. He's loving. He's for you. Submitting to Him is the path to abundance and joy.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's get back to Mark's story, where news of what Jesus did spread quickly.

Good Riddance to Jesus! (14-17)

Good News! (vv. 14-15)

[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.

When they came to see, what they first saw would have been a couple thousand dead pigs floating in the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. That's weird.

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

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

This demoniac who had been ravaging the countryside for years, making passage through the area impossible, screaming at the top of his lungs as he ran naked through the tombs, is now ***"sitting down, clothed and in his right mind"***.

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

Everybody "got" what had happened. The unclean spirits had left this man and had entered the swine.

Now, instead of restless, he is seated calmly; instead of naked, he is fully clothed; instead of raging, he is in his right mind; instead of being alone, he is calmly seated by Jesus.⁹

We see this and think, *"How great is this?! This is 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.

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 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.

They had seen this demoniac break chains. Now, somehow, Jesus has tamed him. They had been successful pig farmers. Now, a sizable herd is gone, no doubt due, somehow, to Jesus.

The Gerasenes wanted nothing to do with Jesus and they pleaded with Him to just go away.

And again, how ironic. The unclean spirits wanted permission to stay in The Decapolis and the people of The Decapolis wanted Jesus to leave.¹⁰

Jesus listened respectfully to their request and very politely walked away. He walked back to the boat, ready to cross the Sea of Galilee again to return to Capernaum.

Except there was one Gerasene who broke with the crowd. One man wasn't thinking *"Good riddance!"* as Jesus was leaving. The former demoniac desperately didn't want to be separated from Jesus. If Jesus was leaving, he wanted to leave, too.

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.

And how cool is this? The former demoniac, begging Jesus for the privilege of sailing with Him. And I can think of all kinds of reasons why he might have wanted to be with Jesus.

He might have been afraid that with Jesus gone, the unclean spirits would return. Or he might have been afraid of how he would be treated by the citizens of Gersa after all those years of being the terror of the territory.

¹⁰ Commentators suggest that their fear stemmed from wondering what else Jesus might do to jeopardize their wealth if He were allowed to stay. If that is the case, what a terrible mis-prioritizing it was to value financial gain over being with Jesus.

Or maybe it wasn't fear. 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.

He had met Jesus as a wreck and was now whole. Of course, he wanted to go with Jesus. And, frankly, everything points to the wisdom of allowing this man to get in the boat with Jesus and the Twelve.

Make him the thirteenth apostle. They're going to need another one, eventually, anyway.

Let him come along. After all, how many disciples really even WANT to drop everything and follow Jesus?

So, will He welcome the man with open arms, *"Hop on in, big fella. There's room for you in My boat. Come, follow Me."*

Listen to this.

"No, you can't come with Me - and GO!" (vv. 19-20)

[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."

Jesus said, "No." He refused the man's request and instead appointed the former demoniac "apostle" to the Decapolis.

Jesus sent him home to tell others what God had done for him. And, at the Lord's word to GO, he WENT.

The only credibility he had was his changed-life story, his calm demeanor, and the clothes on his back.

But with Jesus sailing away from the Decapolis, having stayed just a few short hours, Marks ends his record of the visit with this:

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

Conclusion:

What we have seen today is one of my favorite passages from Mark's Gospel. It may have just become one of your favorites, too.

So many threads come together in this one episode from the life of Jesus.

- **People who are in a mess need rescue. Jesus is eager to rescue.**

My favorite way to describe our church these days is that we are a nice group of messes who are finding a way forward as we trust and follow Jesus.

There are plenty of people all around us who find themselves in messes. Minor and major messes.

They may have made a terrible decision and messed themselves up, may have gotten messed up by someone else, or may have been messed up by circumstances beyond their control.

Watch Jesus' dealings with this man.

He didn't make the demoniac's rescue an inquisition into his past or a matter of promises for the future. He simply rescued him. How loving - and what a great model for us.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost messes we all are.

- **Jesus was rejected for doing good. The same may happen to us.**

When Jesus performed the heroic work of casting demons out of a man, the citizens of that region begged Him to hit the trail.

Hmm...

Don't expect that serving Jesus today will necessarily result in popularity. It may lead to rejection.

That is the experience of Jesus followers in many places in the world today. And this theme - rejection - will be our main theme in a couple of weeks.

And yet, despite the possibility of rejection, nothing compares to the joy of being God's agent in touching someone for Jesus' sake.

Jesus' heart to rescue, His life-changing ways, the reality of rejection and persecution is all true and important.

But, it's the post-rescue experience of the man Jesus rescued that I really want to focus in on as we close.

- **Jesus redeemed the demoniac to live the life He chose. Same for you and me.**

Jesus used this man He redeemed. So, if you are ever tempted to think, *"God would (or could) never use someone like me to make a difference"*, this story says: think again.

The man Jesus left behind to be His apostle to the Decapolis was a formerly naked, insane, demoniac.

As Jesus sailed away, the man ***"began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed."*** - and we have good reason to believe that he was wildly successful.

When we read later in Mark (chapter 8) that a crowd of thousands of people had gathered in the wilderness of the Decapolis to hear Jesus speak, we wonder, *"How did all of these people gain such an interest in Jesus?"*

I have long suspected that the interest of the crowds in Jesus in this foreign region was due to this man's faithfulness.

He carried out his assignment from Jesus to perfection so that when Jesus came back, lots of people wanted to hear him.

Knowing that Jesus used him, you can be confident that there is nothing in your past that need disqualify you from serving Him today.

Please believe that. If Jesus can use this man, He can use you.

If Jesus was willing and able to use Simon Peter and Saul of Tarsus and lots of other messes (like yours truly...), He is more than willing and able to put you to use for His kingdom-of-God purposes.

But notice, when this man explicitly asked Jesus for a particular path to follow - *"Let me get in the boat with You!"* - Jesus said, *"No."*

Think with me about how good and rich and rewarding it would have been to have sailed with Jesus and the other disciples back to Capernaum.

In the days ahead, he would have heard Jesus' teaching and he would have seen Jesus' miracles.

He would have been there for Jesus' confrontations with the religious elite and he would have been there when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

He would have been there for the rest of the story, too: arrest, beating, crucifixion, burial - resurrection.

But Jesus said, *"No."*

And when this man heard, *"No"*, he responded just as we've seen demons and waves and diseases respond to His authority. He submitted.

That our fighting word.

So many people - maybe you - have had painful experience with people and institutions who had authority over you. It could be with government or business, church or family.

The ones in authority used and abused that authority so that the thought of submitting is revolting.

But what if there was an authority figure who wasn't like that?

What if there was an authority who was good, who had your best interests at heart, and who was for you?

What would you do if that authority told you to do something that you didn't really want to do or if He told you to NOT do something you really wanted to do? Wouldn't it make a difference if you knew that the authority loved you?

Sure it would. You'd submit. Gladly, joyfully, enthusiastically. You would trust that authority to lead you in ways that lead to your flourishing.

In a nutshell, that is the main and glorious message of the New Testament about Jesus.

He is the Lord. Not just an authority, but the ultimate Authority, the King of kings and the Lord of Lords.

And He fought for you when He died on the cross. He won the victory over death when He rose from the tomb. He walks with you through your deepest valleys.

He is trustworthy, even when He leads in a way that you would never expect or even choose.

When Jesus saved you, He didn't save you to live the life you chose. He saved you to live the life He chooses. He saved you to lead a life of submission that leads to abundance.