

SERMON NOTES Sunday 22nd March 2020

sunnysidechurch

Theme: Who are we? – We are witnesses

Main passage: **Mark 5.1-20**

Additional passages: **Acts 1.12-26**

Some of the major points made during the sermon:

Layers of meaning

The story of the demon-possessed man has different layers. At its heart, it's about Jesus's encounter with a man who is captive to his passions and who is a danger to himself and others. However there are other themes. It's about uncleanness, it's about the fact that Jesus's ministry goes beyond the Jews, it's a commentary on the toxic politics of Jesus's day and it's about demon possession.

A conflicted person, at the mercy of his elemental passions

The demon possessed man was a piteous but frightening character. He was socially isolated and regarded as less than human. Forced to live outside civil society because of the threat he posed, he was as lost as a person could be. His redeeming feature (but probably also his most tragic characteristic) was that he was achingly aware of his lostness. Though we may not experience the extremes that he did, we can all, I think, understand what it is to be out of control and to be less than we would wish to be.

Jesus: A place of safety

Jesus draws the man's plight to a head before healing him. Whereas to all the other people who had come across him (and to himself v9), the demon possessed man was identified solely by his affliction, Jesus's presence forces a wedge between the man and his demons (v8). Underneath the demon possessed man is a person who has the capacity to be whole. He runs towards Jesus (v6). The demons that are beleaguering the man cannot cope with Jesus's presence (v7) and the man and his demons experience this as torture.

Jesus: Lord of Creation

The calm authority of Jesus as he controls and disposes of these elemental evil forces is breath-taking (v10-13), as is the transformation of the man himself (v15). There is a profound irony in the fact that, at the end of his life, it would be Jesus, naked and alone, cast out of society dying a criminal's death, who would complete the defeat of evil that he illustrated in today's passage.

Called to be a witness

The man wants to go with Jesus (v18) but Jesus tells him he is to be a witness where he is, among his own people (v19-20). He was called to a unique role that only he could fulfil.

Witnessing as an enjoyable pursuit

The demon possessed man really wanted to be with Jesus. 'He begged' (v18). But he obediently accepted Jesus's instruction and had a real impact on the people he lived among in the Decapolis (v19-20).

If we go where God has sent us, we will be in the best place for us to serve Him.

Some questions for this week. Do think about discussing these over the phone with other members of your house group. There are also various digital platforms you could use to hold a 'Virtual House Group'

- ① **How does this passage (and in particular Jesus's reaction to the man) affect our view of people who battle obsession and addiction?**
- ② **'I don't know what made me do it?' Have you ever said this, aloud or to yourself if you've lost control of yourself? What might Jesus reply to you in this circumstance?**
- ③ **Should we be more willing to invite Jesus into the darker corners of our lives? How might we do this? What could we expect if we did?**
- ④ **'The people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.' (Mark 5.17). Why do you think they did this?**
- ⑤ **'The man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him' (Mark 5.20). What might you tell people about what Jesus has done for you? And who are you called to tell this to? Who are the people you are particularly able to speak to?**
- ⑥ **Are there any other issues that the sermon has raised for you?**

Quote of the week

'My song is love unknown, my saviour's love to me. Love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be'. Why not read the whole of this powerful and moving hymn, which reminds us (among other things) that we're not so different from the demon-possessed man in today's bible reading.