

**Worship Outline with Texts**  
**Ghost Stories 2: Jesus vs the Demons**  
**July 19, 2020**

**Countdown (10 minutes)**

*Ghost-y stuff, info about worship, welcome, etc.*

**Opening Verse (Sally)**

*Psalm 51:14-15*

Deliver me from violence, God, God of my salvation, so that my tongue can sing of your righteousness. Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise.

**Prelude**

**Welcome (Rachael)**

**Opening Prayer (Sally)**

**God, we thank you for summer and for the feeling of the sun on our faces. As the days are long and lasting, so your love for us is endless, full of possibilities. Awaken us, as you have awakened all that grows around us, to your light and your love. We turn our faces to you, following your way of light and love. May our worship honor you, we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

**Offering and Prayer (Rachael for the series)**

Holy God, your generosity overflows in our lives. Make us your hands and feet in our communities as we follow you and build your kingdom of justice and peace for all people. Bless these gifts that we offer to our church, and multiply them in service to you and to others. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Song**

*Because He Lives*

God sent His son, they called Him Jesus  
He came to love, heal and forgive  
He lived and died to buy my pardon  
An empty grave is there to prove my savior lives

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow  
Because He lives, all fear is gone  
Because I know He holds the future  
And life is worth the living, just because He lives

How sweet to hold a newborn baby  
And feel the pride and joy He gives  
But greater still the calm assurance  
This child can face uncertain day, because He lives

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow  
Because He lives, all fear is gone  
Because I know He holds the future  
And life is worth the living, just because He lives

And then one day, I'll cross the river  
I'll fight life's final war with pain  
And then, as death gives way to victory  
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He reigns

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow  
Because He lives, all fear is gone  
Because I know He holds the future  
And life is worth the living, just because He lives

### **Scripture (paraphrased to ghost story style)**

Mark 5:1-20 (Rachael's paraphrase, Laura read)

#### ***Jesus vs. the Demons***

Jesus and the disciples were on the move again. They were on a boat together, having just narrowly survived a terrible storm that Jesus somehow had the power to calm at his command. How did he do that? Who has the power to tell the winds to stop blowing and they obey? But this was only the beginning of what the disciples would see in Jesus.

They went across the lake to the Eastern shore. They were tired and ready for a quiet and restful evening. As Jesus climbed from the boat, at the very moment his foot touched the ground, a man came running out from someplace hidden among caves and tombs.

The man was coming toward Jesus, and he was not restrained, but it was clear from the rope burns and chain marks around his wrists and ankles and neck that he had been bound many times before. He lived out here, among the tombs because people in the village were afraid of him. No one was able to keep him subdued. Out here, in the hills among the tombs, he was lonely and afraid. All night and all day he would wander these caves, moaning and crying out, even cutting himself with sharp stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, it was as if something inside of him saw Jesus as dangerous. He ran and fell on his knees in front of Jesus.

Jesus saw his pain and suffering and said, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"

The man shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Don't torture me!"

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."

The man was a prisoner to these many spirits, tortured with agony and despair and loneliness, unwelcome in the company of others, and harming himself.

Still, in the voice of this man, the demons called out to Jesus. They begged Jesus not to send them out of this area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us into those pigs."

Jesus gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

The farmers who were tending the pigs ran off to the village and told everyone what happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and calm and healing; and they were afraid. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell his story to those who would listen. And all the people were amazed.

### **Sermon (Rachael)**

Sermon: Jesus vs the Demons

UMC of Anoka, 7/19/2020

Jesus is an agitator. Have you noticed that about him?

Everywhere he goes he upsets the status quo. He challenges the dynamics of power and questions established norms about righteousness and faithfulness. He defers to those who have been pushed out, cast aside, devalued, and ignored.

Today we catch up with Jesus doing just that in the fifth chapter of Mark's gospel. This is the second week of Ghost Stories, volume 2 here at UMCA. Last Sunday we read about the

prophet Ezekiel who had a spooky vision of a zombie army that only truly came alive when the breath of God's Spirit entered their bodies and brought resurrection. Today, Jesus comes face to face with demons in a story of good vs. evil, life and death. This is also a monster story, but get ready because sometimes monsters are hiding in unexpected places.

Let's get into the story.

Jesus and the disciples have begun public ministry together by traveling in the region of Galilee from town to town. Mark, chapter 1, verses 38-39 tell us that Jesus invites his disciples to go with him to visit towns in the region to preach in the local synagogues and cast out demons. Jesus sets a clear focus for his ministry: to preach a gospel of God's kingdom in as many places as he can and to take on forces of evil by naming and casting out evil wherever he confronts it. This is not a meek and mild Jesus who will spend his ministry cuddling with sheep and offering sentimental sound bytes to make people feel better. This is not a passive aggressive Jesus who will be content to keep the superficial peace and ask why we can't just all get along. This is not a head-in-the-clouds Jesus who invites the disciples on a free-wheeling road trip to teach the world to sing.

Jesus here, in Mark's gospel, sets out with the disciples on a clear two-fold mission. Preach this agitating gospel that will challenge people's comfort zones, status quo operations, and sense of normalcy WHILE seeking out and eradicating evil.

This spooky story has a protagonist who knows what evil lurks, and he is prepared to look it in the face and cast it out.

After a long day of preaching in parables to large crowds along the shores of the Sea of Galilee and time spent explaining to the disciples the meaning behind the stories he was telling, Jesus climbs into a boat. He suggests that they cross over to the other side of the Sea, to the opposite shore into a region called the Decapolis, which was a federation of cities in eastern Palestine.

Mark says in chapter 4 that there were other boats with them, indicating that more followers came along with Jesus and the disciples into this new territory. On the journey across the sea, a storm came up suddenly and swamped the boat with waves and wind. Jesus slept, unbothered, in the stern of the boat until the frantic and frightened disciples woke him, upset that he didn't seem to care about saving their lives. Jesus then displayed his power in creation as he woke up and commanded the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And, says Mark, the wind and waters became calm.

They sailed the calm waters the rest of the way across the sea and approached Gentile, or non-Jewish, territory. And this is where we pick up with the story in chapter 5 that Pastor Laura shared with us this morning.

Immediately, as soon as Jesus steps foot on the beach, when Jesus makes physical contact with the land, a man comes out of the tombs and approaches him. Mark says the man has an

unclean spirit, implies that the man is unclothed, lives here in what is essentially a cemetery among the dead, and has marks on his body indicating both that he has repeatedly been restrained with chains and that he has harmed himself by cutting himself with stones. Not far down the way, a herd of swine are being tended by local farmers.

It's a lot to take in. And that's Mark's point.

Jesus and the disciples have left the Jewish community and ventured to the other side of the sea, into Gentile territory. Mark paints us a picture to understand the level of complete discomfort and utter unbelonging, even disgust the disciples would have experienced in this place. Everything about the setting described is an affront to Jewish culture and custom:

Spending time in Gentile territory: unclean

Living among the dead: unclean

Nakedness: unclean

Unruly behavior: unclean

The spirit that occupies the man: unclean

A herd of swine: unclean

Mark wants us to understand that everything about this moment will sit wrong with Jesus' followers. They are being pushed beyond the healing on the Sabbath Jesus did a few chapters ago and beyond a few intense interactions with religious leaders. Jesus is shattering the boundaries they have spent their whole lives learning to respect and honor.

Jesus is an agitator.

Mark's gospel was likely written for an audience in the first century of well-educated Gentile Christians in southern Europe (think Italy). And clearly Mark has a message for those readers as well. The culture into which Jesus and his disciples have sailed was reflective of Greek and Roman values and influence, in this otherwise Semitic region. The group of cities known as the Decapolis existed as a remnant of Hellenistic culture, which was built upon values such as progress, the pursuit of knowledge, order, and civilization.

This demon-possessed man who meets Jesus on the shore has been locked up, separated from the community, imprisoned and left to live among the tombs of the dead by his enlightened community. The spirit within him has led to unruly behavior, unmanageable outbursts, and he causes people to feel unsafe and unsettled. When restraining him fails, he must be sent away, to the fringes, to live alone with his anguish and to be isolated in his despair.

The story of Jesus' encounter with this one man reveals so many layers of human behavior doesn't it? We fear what we cannot control. We are unsettled, even disgusted at non-conformity. Different is dangerous. Unclean. Uncivilized. Unworthy. We might pause to ask ourselves who has taken this man's dignity from him? The demons or the humans?

This story is one of several exorcism stories in Mark's gospel, part of a sub-genre in biblical literature. There is something significant worth noticing about Jesus' interaction with the demonic or evil or unclean spirit. It is immediately when Jesus sets foot on the land that the man comes to him, falls at his feet, and recognizes who he is. People in this area may have heard of Jesus, but there's no reason why this man should've known Jesus by sight. Except this: in the exorcism genre, evil always recognizes Jesus. Evil knows its enemy and never questions who Jesus is or what he is capable of. While the authorities and even the disciples struggle over and over again to believe and understand, the demons, the unclean spirits, Satan the accuser - whenever they come into contact with Jesus they know exactly whom they are up against.

Jesus calls on the evil to exit the man's body. The man tells Jesus his name is Legion, buying time as he seems to know that Jesus will cast him out. Evil knows that Jesus won't allow it to stay, unchecked. And evil is legion, multitude, a powerful battalion.

The spirit asks Jesus for a compromise, not wanting to be sent away from the area, that Jesus would instead cast the demon into the nearby herd of swine. Jesus consents and, seemingly driven to madness by the spirits, the herd of thousands of swine runs down the steep bank into the sea and is drowned.

The story doesn't stop here. Next, those farmers who just lost their entire livelihood run into the town for help. There is room to have empathy for them in this tale. Thousands of swine, their way of making a living to support their families, and a source of economic stability for the region. Completely demolished. The townspeople return, and though they now see the man they had only known as undesirable now sitting calmly, fully clothed and healed, they were still afraid and seemed more concerned with sending Jesus away, angry about the fate of the animals. They begged him to leave the area. They wanted nothing to do with him.

In the end, the cost was too great. The miracle too unbelievable. They sent Jesus away.

The man, now feeling like himself again asks to go with Jesus. He's smart enough to guess that people may still not want him around. They've already decided he is dangerous and what they've lost in his healing was not worth the trade for them. But Jesus invites him instead to go into the Decapolis and tell his story, share his truth. He finds those who will listen, and when they do, they are amazed.

This week a friend shared with me about a preacher she had encountered in a teaching session. His name is Reverend Marvin White. In the session, he explored with participants the importance of seeing the places where the Bible connects to present life. In other words, how is God made present to us today through these words? What questions do we ask of this story that might help us ask questions in our own time and place?

Who gets to decide what is clean or unclean? How are fear and control impacting the ways we treat people? What is the purpose of imprisonment? Who deserves to be banished or bound?

What does healing look like? What cost are we willing or unwilling to pay for the sake of our neighbors' human dignity and healing from trauma?

Rev. White offered his own paraphrase of Mark 5 in his talk, changing the title to George Floyd, chapter 5, verses 1-13.

If you were to retell this story in light of the world we live in today, what might you call it? In your imagining would Jesus take on the evil of racism and brutality? The stigmas of mental illness and lack of adequate mental health services? Unjust imprisonment? Lack of care for creation? Wealth distribution? I'd love to see your ideas if you want to send me an email this week.

We have no shortage of demons to face in our world.

What we must examine is whether or not we want Jesus to agitate us, or whether we'd prefer to send him on his way.

Amen.

### **Song**

*This World is Not My Home*

U Can Jug or Nots

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through  
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue;  
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,  
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

O Lord, you know I have no friend like you,  
If heaven's not my home, then Lord what will I do?  
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,  
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

They're all expecting me, and that's one thing I know,  
My Savior pardoned me and now I onward go;  
I know He'll take me thro' tho' I am weak and poor,  
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

Just up in glory-land we'll live eternally,  
The saints on every hand are shouting victory,  
Their songs of sweetest praise drift back from heaven's shore,  
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

## **Prayers (Laura)**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Song**

#### *Cry of My Heart*

It is the cry of my heart to follow you  
It is the cry of my heart to be close to you  
It is the cry of my heart to follow all of the days of my life

Teach me your holy ways O Lord  
So I can walk in your truth  
Teach me your holy ways O Lord  
And make me wholly devoted to you

Open my eyes so I can see  
The wonderful things that you do  
Open my heart up more and more  
And make me wholly devoted to you

### **Benediction (Rachael)**

### **Postlude**