The Gadarene

Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39



Let me tell you my story.
I was a proud young man , – intent to show my worth to family and village. I received good training, was married and had children. The synagogue was my second home, and my prayers deep and devout.
But somehow, I never met my high ambition. Never achieved what I expected or what was expected of me.

I'll tell you: some habits are no good and self-pity is one of the worst.
I found myself caught in a deep rut, deeper than you could ever imagine, banging against the sides, unable to turn around, unable to escape the sporadic tumbling forward, with the utter helplessness of seeming to be controlled by something else, being led I knew not where, unable to change direction, hating myself for not caring what I might do. Self-pity consumed me, like an army of hungry ants gnawing away at the inner core of a once proud tree, leaving it hollow.
Frustration and anger and emptiness made me lose my mind. I became dangerous to all around me and was cast out to protect those I loved and those I didn't even know.



I lived in the wilderness, and my world was mountains and tombs, tombs and mountains. The chains with which they bound me could not withstand my rage. My strength frightened me. In bitterness and guilt, I would smash the rocks and tombstones and no man could or even dared to stop me. Over time, the clothes ragged off my body, blown thin by the mountain wind. For up in the clear air it was glorious, – I felt a freedom away from everything, – I would run and jump, skip and laugh out loud with the scant grass and burnt-out bushes as companions, feeling at one with nature, the pure happiness of life as it can be. But it never lasted. I would descend once more down, down the slopes. Bitter contrast. Even the unclean swine were my friends, secretly being fattened on the hidden hillsides for the black-market traders. I knew all about them: I felt I knew everything. I did not care. Here was I, free, but trapped more thoroughly than any prison or chain could bind. Often, I would slump against a tombstone, worn out yet exhilarated, lonely and looking for danger to end my life, cutting myself with stones out of spite against myself and God, daring Him to kill me, but all the time knowing that somehow God loved me, was there, waiting for me.

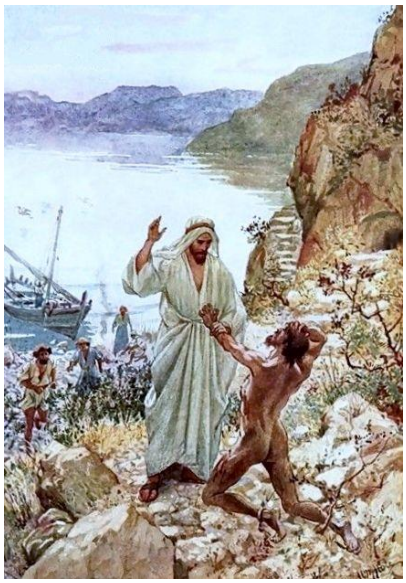
Then came the day that changed everything. I remember the ferocious storm that came from nowhere. The wind and rain blowing, lashing, pushing me along the shore. The rain stung on my naked flesh, and through the squall I could just make out boats on the sea, being tossed like corks. I made the effort to stand still, hand up to my eyes, willing them to sink while yet praying for their safety, dancing with delight at the futility of everything and nothing.

The boat in the front was in the greatest difficulty. I could see fisherman hanging on for their lives, – a few of them were making their way to the prow. One bent down, and I could see someone getting up. Though the winds were fierce, I swear that boat stopped rocking! I rubbed my eyes through the rain. The waves didn't crash into it, but somehow seemed to move round as though it wasn't there! A man stood up, stretched out his arms, and the storm ceased completely. Every boat was calm.
How I wish you could have been there with me, seen too what I saw. I tell you it was no coincidence. One followed the other. Immediately. Suddenly. Heavy clouds that had covered the sky just rolled back and disappeared. The wild waves that moments before had crashed 'gainst the shoreline gone, just lapping quietly, tinged white against the khaki-sand and now clear-blue sky. Had I imagined it? My wet skin and dripping hair gave proof of the storm that was no dream! My eyes and the warm sun spoke of a new horizon. Mountains and

tombs, tombs and mountains. Storm or peace. Peace, no storm. What was real? My thoughts were all over the place. The boats were landing.

The man that stilled the storm got out with the fisherman all round him. I was sufficiently close to see his features. In a flash of insight, I suddenly knew who he was. Recognition overtook my consciousness. I knew that he would read me! Would lay bare my demon thoughts. I feared the truth, whatever that might be. I ran down towards him, barely a hundred yards, shouting and yelling, the mad man from the tombs in full cry! He might control the storm, but he won't control me! I didn't want to be healed, yet I yearned to be free. I wanted to get rid of him, yet I knew he was my master. Even as I ran towards him, I knew that the power he expressed was invincible, but that didn't stop me.

He showed no fear.



He called out, addressing the error and not me, calling for the evil spirits to leave me. The power of his command, his total lack of fear, stopped me in my tracks just yards from him and his disciples. I knelt to the ground. And I felt as though a voice not mine answered back to him:
"What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not."
Even as I spoke those words and looked in his eyes, I felt a glorious battle taking place in my thoughts, – all the demons of my past ranged against the simple standard of his unity with God. He asked me my name and again I heard my answer *"Legion"*, a final throw at him of all the spirits and goblins in my mind, a final attempt to outnumber and challenge his authority. My legion would outnumber him. Yet he stayed so calm, – what was I compared to the mighty storm! Once more he raised his arm, this time to the storm in my head and not the sky. He extended his hand towards my head, and then towards the herd of swine on the hillside in a throw-away gesture. It was if he was saying "Look and behold! God's power and goodness are infinite! His is the only power, and the only true power we have is by reflection. His goodness is supreme. Share my understanding and be whole!" And the storm inside me ceased. Was gone.

The pigs leapt and danced, ran in to each other, squealing, scrabbling madly. The swineherds could not control them. They gathered pace down the slope, sliding, falling, crashing down into the sea. Not one was left. Not one was left, my friend. All the fears, torments, the self-pity and latent violence, all gone. Not just removed from me to live again, but destroyed. It was as though the whole area around us had not just witnessed the stilling of the tempest but also the absolute destruction of all that was wrong or not under the control of the infinite God. Infinite and exception don't exist.

Infinite and exception don't exist

Jesus was smiling at me. That's the real point of what I am saying.
Where the storm was, he saw peace and calm. Where I was, he saw not a mad man, intent on murder and self-mutilation, but God's child. Which was true? He smiled because he loved and knew what he saw, and I felt in that smile and in his eyes such power that, like the demons were not me, that power was not him, but came straight from God, was God, and he was God's mouthpiece. He saw the truth so clearly it was manifested to all around him, and all around him partook of the same sense of power and might, – he gave us our true sense of dominion as God's children, – we were all his brothers and sisters, yes, that's it, my friend, for God is the Father of every one of us, yes, you and me, everyone. I too now loved what he saw, what he was seeing. I had seen the Truth of my being, and in truly loving myself, I was immune from dark thoughts, - they were no more, not removed, but gone.

I remember so clearly with both awe and understanding what happened next. I stood up, looked at my naked body, – all signs of mutilation had gone. One of his disciples brought me a robe from their boat. For the first time in I don't know how long I was dressed and felt complete. I was at peace. I was at one with the universe, with God, no longer tortured by my false sense of consciousness, but now knowing that divine consciousness is true being. Legion had no place in the infinity of God's ever presence. I remembered a Bible verse from my youth

Divine consciousness is true being

"The Lord, he is God, and there is none else beside Him". It's that simple!

Jesus talked with all of us, sharing the gospel, sharing his love of God. He had proved everything of which he spoke. And we just sat listening, drinking in the spiritual truths which he was proving all the time. The utter restlessness of mountains-tombs a distant memory, no longer how I saw myself. All those wrong and restless thoughts, the legion of them claiming to be me, that false identity that had bound me, simply gone! I had a new-found purpose, – to have and recognise that same mind that was in Jesus, to be at one with his clear sense of Father, to see myself as worthy of his love.



Eventually Jesus and his disciples got back in their boat and went back whence they came. I watched the sail disappear over the horizon of the peaceful sea, knowing that although they had gone, His God was still here and everywhere. The power that had calmed the storms and tempests was universal and supreme, was not confined to one person or place. I could feel God's presence remaining with me. I was a new man, God's man, and it was God that had trod down my enemies.

Before Jesus left, he had taken me by the hands, looked at me with that deep love of his, and said to spread the good news. When he had gone, Love remained. And here I am now, back with my beloved family. My fellow villagers had not wanted Jesus to stay. They were, and many remain, too frightened of what he did, frightened to change their way of life. They look at me, and pass by on the other side. But here I stand as God's witness, untouched by the nothing of their negative thoughts: they are nothing, for my God, who never stopped loving me, is now everything to me. God's *infinite* Love is always with me.

God's *infinite* Love is always with me

God has restored those years the locust devoured. All storms have gone, as though they never were. I am at peace and free! And I have freedom because I have the mind and love of Christ, yes, we *all* have the mind and love of Christ! It's that which spreads the good news, brings healing, protects us. Dear friend, feel that love, know it in your heart, and rejoice!

Love has set me free, and I have found peace.

And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten,
And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.
Joel 2:25, (to first ,) 26

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
John 8:32

Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.
II Cor 13:11 Be

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