

The Healing of the Demon-possessed Man

Mark 5:1-20 is one of my favourite reports of Jesus' miracles. It is also recorded in Matthew 8:28-34 and Luke 8:26-39 but neither of them include the wonderful verse in Mark:

When [the people] came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. (v15) NIV.

The beauty of this picture of the man is in its sheer ordinariness, his normality.

The story starts with the description of the pitiful man, so demonised, tortured, so lonely, so hopeless that "Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (v5) The Luke account also tells us that he had not worn clothes for a long time. (Luke 8:27) We are not told how long the man has been in this condition nor what caused his demonic possession in the first place, a possession so total that he is uncontrollable and breaks his chains by sheer force. He has no identity of his own. He can't even give his own name when Jesus asks; the demons respond instead. He is simply an object of fear, a threat to everybody around him and yet probably also on the receiving end of derision. His family has thrown him out or the demons took him out. I imagine the latter since the family would have been powerless to throw him out. He is beyond human help.

Then came Jesus. He had said to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side [of the lake]". (Matthew 4:35). It sounds like a spontaneous decision because the Bible records that the disciples "took him along, just as he was, in the boat." (4:36). Surely Jesus was on a mission, crossing the lake specifically to set this demonised man free.

Jesus cast out the demons and for the first time we are able to see the man himself. He is sitting with Jesus, he is dressed and he is in his right mind. What a contrast to the naked man standing humiliated in front of Jesus and boat-loads of his disciples. He is sitting with Jesus and his disciples, restored to fellowship with his fellow man, but especially restored to fellowship with Jesus, sitting at rest and at peace. All he wanted to do was to stay with Jesus, but when Jesus got back into the boat, Jesus had something important for him to do: "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." (v19).

There is a time for sitting, for resting, for being; there is a time for going and doing. Jesus' great commission is "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Mark 16:15.