

Chris Murphy

June 29th, 2025

Mark 5: 1-20

Sermon Title: Healing Mentally within Community

Prayer...

Introduction:

We are continuing our summer sermon series today on Holy Spirit Healing Stories by exploring the story of the demon possessed man healed by Jesus. Scholars who have explored this story have wondered whether the man in our story in addition to demon possession may have struggled with mental health problems. Therefore, I think this story is a good one to help us explore the mental health struggles that many people experience.

A little bit about my background related to mental health and the field of Psychology... (My time as an Admission Counselor for School of Psychology at Fuller, my own therapy, and my work as a spiritual

director). Highlight the importance of integration of faith and psychology.

One thing I want to mention is that mental health is a topic that relates to all of us. In our story today about the man with demon possession, I want to make sure I emphasize that demon possession is different than mental illness. I do believe in demons and demon possession, but demon possession is actually fairly rare. You find it more often in places where there is significant witchcraft or Satanism. Although actual possession is fairly rare, it is common during our daily lives to occasionally feel what I might call the presence of evil. You can pick it up in some movies or TV shows. You can feel it in different environments where evil actions are done. I sometimes wake up in the middle of the night with a nightmare and sense an evil presence. In those moments I speak with authority the name of Jesus and invite the Holy Spirit to come and bring me peace.

Jesus in our story is not at all intimidated by demons. He casts them out of the man and they enter into a group of unfortunate pigs that run off a cliff. About a week ago, when I was on vacation, I visited some animals at Cedar Springs camp where my wife's parents live and we visited some some donkeys, llamas, chickens, an emu bird, and yes, some pigs. I hate too think of the poor pigs in the story. I wonder if Jesus paused after they ran off the cliff and thought to himself- whoops.

Anyways what strikes me as most interesting about this story is how the man who is healed by Jesus wants to follow him but Jesus encourages him to go back to his community. He moves from isolation back into community. He is fully healed and restored by being part of a community.

In our lives, we usually get into trouble when we stay in isolation.

During the pandemic a few years ago we did livestream only for our church for 15 months. Most Sundays during that time it was Paula,

Gary, my wife Karen, Lish, Chiara and a few of our liturgists coming in. Our church stayed together through livestream worship. Many of you attended worship from home in your pajamas. I did not have that luxury, which is probably a good thing. I could have worn my pajamas here in this sanctuary to identify with you all, but I figured that may be a little awkward.

What I heard from folks at home and other friends during the pandemic is that some enjoyed a break from formal church. Some left church entirely and it felt kind of nice to experience some space. Over time though, many people found themselves returning to church after in person worship began again. What some folks found out is that without church, isolation became too easy. For the spiritual and mental health benefits of church, many people decided to come back.

I am interested in how community supports our mental health and healing. According to NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness,

one in five people struggle with a mental condition. On the NAMI website is an article on the benefits of community on mental health.

The author suggests three main benefits:

Belonging

If you've ever felt like you don't fit in, you know it can be a lonely experience. Community provides a sense of belonging — a group you identify as being a part of. This is different than conforming to be in a group. **A true sense of belonging includes the ability for you to feel you are a part of the community as your true self. There is not anything you have to change to be a part of the community, but instead, you are embraced and appreciated for your unique qualities.**

Support

Who do you turn to when you need something? Having people you can call on when you need to talk or need help with something can

help you through difficult situations that might feel insurmountable alone. **Knowing there are people who support you can help you feel cared for and safe, and can benefit your outlook on life.**

Purpose

In community, people fill different roles. Perhaps you're the friend who enjoys cooking and can be counted on to bring a hot meal over when someone is going through something. Or you're the friend who others know they can call when they need to talk about their struggles. These roles can give you a sense of purpose through bettering other people's lives. Having purpose, and helping others, helps give meaning to life.

So those are a few benefits of community. Of course within a church community we also are learning together about the love of Jesus and

we are experiencing spiritual growth that strengthens our capacity to love God, ourselves, and others.

I want to share a story from my past that speaks to the importance of sharing friendship and community with others. Tell the story of Bruce from En Christo days...

Friends, I feel sorry that we lost track of Bruce. I hope his life improved after I knew him. I am not sure, but I know part of our calling as a church is to continue to look for ways to care for people like Bruce who struggle with isolation and possibly with mental health concern or mental illness. One way we can support the healing of our ourselves and others who struggle with mental health is through the gift of Christian community. Isolation is not the answer to the stresses of life. We need each other. We need the gift of the community of the Holy Trinity. By the way our church offers community in multiple ways: Men's Team, Men's Fellowship, Space

for Grace, Another Women ministry will be starting in the Fall with the help of our friends Gina Chandler, Joan Klinkhammer, and my wife Karen. We also will be having gatherings for families of children and youth. There are a lot of ways we seek to build community here, so just let us know if you are looking for a place to connect and we will find a community for you here within our church.

The Holy Spirit will always lead us into some form of community, so we do not face our struggles alone. Friends, if you are going through something difficult right now, find someone in your life to share your struggles. Maybe a therapist, or a spiritual director. Maybe a friend in this church or in town. Maybe your pastor. Please do not try to function alone. God never intended us to be alone on the journey of life and faith. Let us pray...

Mark 5:1-20

5 They came to the other side of the sea, to the region of the Gerasenes.[a] 2 And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. 3 He lived among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain, 4 for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces, and no one had the strength to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. 6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him, 7 and he shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” 8 For he had said to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” 9 Then Jesus[b] asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is

Legion, for we are many.” 10 He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the region. 11 Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding, 12 and the unclean spirits[c] begged him, “Send us into the swine; let us enter them.” 13 So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, stampeded down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea.

14 The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. 15 They came to Jesus and saw the man possessed by demons sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion, and they became frightened. 16 Those who had seen what had happened to the man possessed by demons and to the swine reported it. 17 Then they began to beg Jesus[d] to leave their neighborhood. 18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him.

19 But Jesus[e] refused and said to him, “Go home to your own people, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you.” 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.