

Demons and Pigs **Mark 5:1-20**

Friends I'm wondering...what is the animal of your nightmares? What is the animal that shows up in your worst dreams which embodies all the darkness, fear and evil which makes a nightmare a nightmare? What is it...a wolf, a snake, a dog, a lion, maybe a great white shark? Whatever animal it is I'm willing to bet that it doesn't look like a regular one.

The animal of your nightmares is somewhat demonic isn't it? Probably bigger, more vicious, with longer sharper teeth and bigger fangs, and if you've ever looked it in the eyes they probably aren't normal – they're most likely lit up with an evil red glow...and they seem to look right through you.

And maybe the animal of your nightmares isn't just part of your subconscious fear of evil...

Maybe it's because of a movie you saw – Hollywood is especially good at using an animal to personify evil. Think of Jaws, Cujo, The Birds, or Arachnophobia with those deadly smart killer spiders.

Or maybe you've had some sort of encounter with an animal which has terrorized you.

There was a vicious monster dog which you had to walk past on your way to school...you were always terrified that one day while you walked past it would somehow get through the fence and take you down...

What is the animal of your nightmares friends?

And I'm asking you to think about this today, because we need it in order to understand what we see Jesus doing as we continue in our journey of walking alongside Him.

You need to be able to relate somehow with the feelings and thoughts which the pig brought up for the Jews of Jesus day. This was the animal they had nightmares about, and it wasn't simply just because it was considered an unclean animal under the Law of Moses – Rabbits and Lobsters were unclean and not to be eaten as well.

For the Jews it had to do with what had happened to them only 200 years earlier when Antiochus Epiphanies IV – a

descendent of Alexander the Great - launched an all out persecution against the Jews, with the intentions of forcing them to become Hellenistic Greeks or be destroyed.

So He forced Greek culture on the Jews. He burned whatever copies of the Scriptures he could find, He forbid circumcision on the pain of death, and resorted to every conceivable form of torture to convince the Jews to renounce their faith. In 168 BC he attacked and devastated Jerusalem, and had an altar to Zeus set up in the Temple and sacrificed...*a pig* on the altar of the LORD.

So for the Jews of Jesus day, the pig was truly the animal which embodied their worst nightmare – a foreign power that could come and invade their land, force them to abandon their religious customs and defy the living God to His face by sacrificing an unclean animal - a pig, on His altar.

And this was their worst nightmare because it meant that God had abandoned them. But Jesus has now arrived – He is Emmanuel – God with us – they are not abandoned anymore, the Messiah has come.

And most Jews believed that when the Messiah arrived he would deliver them from the foreign powers which had conquered them – like Rome, and He would purify Israel from heathen cultural influences, and He would go on the offensive to bring judgment on those nations which had oppressed Israel and defiled God's Temple.

And we certainly see Jesus delivering and purifying – just not in the way people had expected. He's not delivering Israel from the power of Rome or denouncing Greek cultural influences...

He's delivering Israel from the power of sin and the devil!

And this morning we see Jesus demonstrating that His power over the devil extends beyond the borders of the nation of Israel, in fact it reaches right into the enemy territory.

So Jesus takes the disciples on a raid, they are going to go across to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, outside of the boundaries of the promised land... into enemy territory.

So they get in their boats and sail across the Sea, like the Allied Forces approaching the beaches of Normandy in WW II.

And as they approach the other side, the enemy's radar picks them up and the defenses kick in. A furious storm suddenly picks up and attacks them, kicking up waves in an attempt to swamp their boats and destroy the invaders.

But Jesus simply dismisses this supernatural storm with a couple of words – Quiet, Be still! And immediately the storm is gone – Jesus has just smashed through the outer defenses of the enemy's territory and is moving ahead.

So Jesus and the disciples land on the shore and as soon as Jesus steps out of the boat He encounters the enemy's militia – demons who have possessed a man and driven him mad.

Actually the demons are far less like a militia and more like terrorists who wage guerilla warfare hiding among the civilian population – they've possessed this man and they approach Jesus through him.

And because this is their home turf, they will not yield to Jesus as easily as the demons back in Israel have – whom Jesus silences and casts out with a single word. These demons go on

the offensive calling out Jesus' name – for by knowing and speaking the full name of someone you can exercise authority over them – the demons attempt to limit what Jesus will do to them, they resist his initial command to come out of the man they've possessed.

So Jesus counters by asking them for their name, and they cagily reply – we are Legion...

Now a Legion in the Roman Army consisted of approximately 5000 soldiers, in other words the demon is telling Jesus there are so many of us you're going to have a hard time getting all our names and casting us out.

But Jesus stands his ground, though the demons continue to try and resist him – delaying by appealing to him not to send them away. Finally they come up with an idea, Jesus will inevitably drive them out of the man – so perhaps they can find another way to remain in the territory which they occupy – there is a large herd of pigs nearby, maybe they can go into the pigs?

Now pause for a moment here – so far we’ve paid very little attention to the condition of the man whom the demons possessed – but let’s focus on that for a moment.

It says he was living in the tombs – he’s isolated from the living, surrounded by death. Driven out of his mind by his possessors he would scream in torment and cut himself with stones, attempts to subdue him and control him had been futile

– his demonic strength was able to snap chains and handcuffs, but most likely sustaining injuries to himself in the process – friends, Gollum would seem to be in better condition than this man...

He is ravaged by the Legion of Demons and they are destroying him – much as a herd of pigs will destroy and ravage the countryside and crops if they are not properly herded.

So it is fitting then that Jesus gives the demons permission to enter into the herd of pigs – one destructive, unclean force entering another – a perfect match... or so it would seem.

You see when they had possessed the man, they had driven him mad, pretty much made him into an animal – so when they possess the animals, the pigs - absolute chaos ensues and we see that Jesus has tricked the unclean spirits by granting them entry into an unclean herd that will turn on them in madness and destroy them.

The entire herd of pigs goes berserk and runs down into the sea and drowns – taking the demons with them.

The man’s nightmare is finally over, and any Jewish reader would notice the irony that is going on here... Jesus, using a herd of the enemy’s pigs to defeat the demonic... which had powered their enemies like Antiochus Epiphanies. Jesus is ending the nightmare using the animal of their nightmares.

So we see friends that Jesus the Messiah is quite capable of defeating the evil powers which drove the ancient empires to persecute and oppress the people of God, but unlike those evil powers Jesus will not “possess them” subjugate them or coerce them into God’s Kingdom.

He graciously leaves when the townspeople beg him to go, he doesn't use his awesome power to force them to accept him - however...he leaves behind the man he has delivered. He is to be a constant reminder to them that there is a greater power than a legion of demons and it is a power that puts people in their right mind and restores them into their communities.

So friends, in this "invasion" Jesus teaches us some important lessons.

Friends, there's no limit to what Jesus will sacrifice to set someone free from the destructive powers of the enemy. As we know - he will eventually offer his own life to set us all free from the power of sin and death.

There's a delicious irony in the fact that while the enemy sacrificed one pig in the temple to defy Yahweh and bring the Jews into his kingdom - Jesus sacrifices 2000 pigs to set one man free from the enemy's control and bring him back into God's Kingdom.

And friends this story shows us that we are never really out of Jesus' effective reach, and that is reassuring news for us.

Because, sometimes we might wonder if we are out of his reach - perhaps our life has been pushed around by forces beyond our control and we've found ourselves someplace in life we'd never thought we'd be - divorced, mentally ill, grief stricken or bankrupt...

And maybe we may have family members, friends, neighbors, relatives, co-workers who seem to be unreachable, they are outside the boundaries of our church community, their hearts are far away from Christ.

They are held captive by lies, false religions, addictions, emotional baggage, unbelief... and sometimes yes - by demons as well.

And the results are a stunted life, full of pain, damage, isolation...but friends we are never beyond the reach and the power of Jesus Christ, what we saw this morning shows us as much.

Nor are we beyond the reach of Christ's body – the church. Remember Jesus said to Peter “On this rock I will build my church...and the gates of Hell will not stand against it”

Friends whatever sorts of hell people might be going through when they come to us, however life might have beat them up and pushed them around - we accept them and embrace them in Jesus name – nobody is beyond Jesus reach!

And friends we can also go on the offensive for those who seem to be unreachable through prayer in Jesus name. James says “*the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*” who is more righteous than Jesus – prayer in his name is powerful and effective.

Jesus himself said “*you may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it!*”(John 14:14)

We can do battle against the enemy through prayer in Jesus name so that those who are held captive to lies, false religions, addictions, emotional baggage, unbelief, and even demons -

can be set free – their nightmare over, made whole once again - -- followers of Jesus Christ.

This is a dream come true! And listen to what happens to some of the animals which people often have nightmares about –

The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:7-9)

The nightmare is over, what was only dreamed about will finally come true – evil and sin will have been completely wiped out, peace and love rule the world and friends... Jesus is the ONE – the Chosen one who is going to make this all of this happen – we saw but a foretaste of this today.

So put your faith and trust in Him and believe...then go and tell everyone what Jesus has done for you as well. Amen.