

**MARK 5:1-20****WISHES WHEN HE COMES**

*Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me." For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!"*

*Then He asked him, "What is your name?" And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many." Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains. So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may enter them." And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.*

*So those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened. Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and about the swine.*

*Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region. And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.*

**WISHES WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES:** Hearts are filled with wishes at Christmas. For children--new toys, new devices, new boots, new hat, new outfit. There are wishes in the hearts of adults too—good weather, safe travel, no sickness—or, thinking deeper—no war, no recession, no political wrangling, no terrorist attacks, no riots. But I'm talking about the wishes when real **Christmas** comes, not secular Christmas with all its outer trappings, but real Christmas, the spiritual Christmas with its message of forgiveness and salvation in Christ? What are the wishes of all when standing in the presence of the Gospel message of the Savior from sin, death, and hell?

Jesus and His disciples had just crossed by boat to the east side of the Sea of Galilee—not really part of Jewish territory. On the trip, the disciples had awakened Him in great fear. A storm had arisen; they thought they were going under! Jesus said to the wind and the sea, "Peace. Be still!" Then Jesus said to the men, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" The disciples marveled, "Even the wind and the sea obey Him!" Jesus controls the entire physical universe. As Christmas approaches, do not fear for the details of physical Christmas. All details are safe in God's hands, whether you think so or not. Do not think God has fallen asleep in the boat, "O, you of little faith."

When they reached the eastern shore, Jesus got off the boat and was promptly greeted by a wild man. This man lived in the tombs—in the cemetery caves; wore no clothes (Luke)—one hopes a loin cloth maybe; cried out night and day—bone chilling shrieks for sure; had superhuman strength—snapped chains and shackles; cut himself with stones—no care for his own body. This man was demon-possessed! The devil controlled his mind and actions. He ran toward Jesus, bowed before Him, and shrieked, "What have I to do with You?!" In other words, "Jesus, we are not friends! Stay away!" The Bible doesn't say if the disciples were afraid at this little altercation. One hopes they remembered Jesus' calming the wind and the waves, as well as Jesus' words about little faith. They were about to see that Jesus controls the spiritual realm also!

The man knew who Jesus was. "Jesus, Son of the Most High God!" The Epistle of James tells us, "*The demons also believe and tremble*" (James 2:19). The demons acknowledge and believe that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist. They do not believe in, or trust in, or have faith in, God. Strange, how so many people deny the existence of God, but not even the demons do that!

The man—the demon in the man—knew Jesus’ power was superior. He invoked Jesus, in God’s name, *not to torment him*. The demon feared the worst; Jesus had already commanded him to depart from the man. Jesus asked the man’s name. His answer was astounding “My name is Legion, for we are many.” A legion was a unit in the Roman army. If a legion were full, it had 10,000 troops. Oftentimes there were maybe only 7,000. At any rate, no wonder this man acted so crazy! And yet, all these demons together were afraid of Jesus. How weak the devil is compared to the Lord.

The possessed man was face to face with Jesus, the Savior from sin. It was his “Christmas!” But the devil led him to react with disinterest and terror—Stay away, Jesus! That’s what the devil wants you to wish at your spiritual Christmas. Disinterest and hostility. The devil wants you to conclude that if Christmas has to do with Jesus the Savior from sin, then it spoils the joy, the party spirit, of Christmas. And it does! The devil wants you to push Jesus out of the celebration of Christmas, so that the devil can take over. Is he gaining ground? In the world, yes!

The demons knew they were on the way out and, therefore, begged Jesus not to send them *out of the country*. They liked their little home among the tombs of death in this god-less land. Luke says, They begged Jesus not to send them into “the deep”—referring either to the sea, or back to the depths of hell. They requested being sent into pigs nearby. Imagine, preferring to live with the pigs! The demons do not prefer hell. Jesus consented. When they entered the herd, the 2000 pigs went berserk, stampeded over the cliff into the sea, and drowned. Sad demons.

Immediately, the pig-tenders ran back to town and related to the people there and in the region around the breathtaking events. The people came to see for themselves. The swine were gone. Jesus was there. The wild man, clothed and in his right mind, was there! This was their time, standing before Jesus, who has power to undo the devil, who brings God’s love, forgiveness, and salvation to all. This was their “Christmas!” What was their wish? *They pleaded with Him to depart from their region!* The presence of Jesus the Savior, their Savior, was too hard for them! It cost them too much—their pigs! and what else?

Is that your wish at Christmas? “Let’s keep Jesus and forgiveness of sins in the background—maybe, the far background.” Will you have to give up something, if you put salvation in Jesus in the heart of your celebration? Will you have to give up parties where conduct is less than God-pleasing? Will you have to give up celebrating Christmas with freely flowing alcohol? Will you have to give up Christmas humor that is out of bounds? Will you have to give up a long-held family tradition, that denies Jesus? The townsmen in this text wouldn’t give up anything, and asked Jesus to leave. A sad commentary on sinful human nature and the in-roads of Satan.

What was the ex-demon man’s wish, at his “Christmas”? He had just been given something very special. Freedom from the demons’ control over his body, and also spiritual freedom from the condemnation of his sins—mercy and forgiveness in Christ! The man wished to go with Jesus, to be with Him. Of course! Do you?

But what was Jesus wish? Actually there were two. What was Jesus’ first wish? To go across the Sea of Galilee to rescue this one man from Satan. Jesus is just so interested in you. You are not merely another blade of grass. God looks and longs for you to be in His family. He sent His Son for your forgiveness! Indeed, Christmas is for you! That’s what Jesus wishes. But Jesus’ wish for this man was also *Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you*-- share your account of God’s compassion on you! The man did. Will you? You can’t change the world, or the country, or the state; but the message is easily shared with those closest—family and friends--who value your words. The ex-demon man did more. He *began to proclaim in Decapolis [the region] all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled*. The message spread into the region, and all were amazed at what Jesus had done. Salvation in Jesus is amazing, These words sound similar to the words about the shepherds after they went to Bethlehem to see Jesus in the manger. They didn’t stay with Jesus either. *Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds (Luke 2:17-18)!*

Wishes at Christmas? The devil’s wishes—unbelief. The rejectors’ wishes—go away. The Savior’s wishes—your heart. The Christian’s wishes—cling to Jesus, rejoice, share with those near to you!

So be it. Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---