

**Sermon Preached By Canon Jim Holbeck At The Healing Service At St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney On Wed 7<sup>th</sup> September 2005.  
Reading: Lk 8:26-39. Topic: "Jesus Sets The Captives Free".**

This story in Lk 8 is preceded by the account of Jesus and the disciples crossing a lake at night. When He fell asleep a violent windstorm struck their boat and it began to sink. When they woke him up *He rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm.* He challenged them with the words, "Where is your faith?" The disciples were afraid at this demonstration of the power of God operating through Jesus and asked each other, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"

They had seen Jesus' authority in bringing peace to a raging storm. Now they were to see Jesus' authority in bringing peace to a mind that was out of control. God can do amazing things in the lives of the most unlikely people. We read here of a man who had lost control of his life and come under the power of an evil spirit.

**1. A MAN CONTROLLED BY EVIL POWERS. 8:26-27**

*26 Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes which is opposite Galilee. 27 When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.*

The powers of darkness hate humans who are made in the image of God. They try to gain control over people. They try to humiliate people so that they become more and more degraded, more like an animal than a human. Sometimes degraded even worse so that they keep on manifesting evil.

This man was acting less and less like a human.

- v26. He is described as a man who had demons, evil spirits.
- v27. He was living habitually naked. This wasn't a sign that he was free but rather that he was bound to the powers of darkness who tried to humiliate him and shame him. And they had succeeded.
- He lived in the tombs among the dead, not like normal human beings.
- v.29. He had supernatural strength but it was destructive. We read of the demon that *For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.*
- Mark in his gospel adds that the man was always shouting out among the tombs and in bouts of self-destruction cutting himself with stones. It would just be a matter of time before he did himself a fatal injury. In the eyes of most people, he was stark raving, mad, and he would never be any different.

**2. SET FREE BY THE POWER OF GOD**

Everyone else may have given up on him, but God hadn't. Jesus went all that way and ministered to just one person whom it seemed was beyond human help.

As we think about the needs of other people, do we deep down think that God can't change them dramatically? That may be why our prayers don't seem to get very far at times.

The Gadarene demoniac had no qualities at all that might endear him to other people. He could simply have died and no one would have missed him. But he mattered to God and to Jesus.

As we look at the needs of people:-

We may sometimes have a lot of pity for them. That doesn't help them. Or we may have a lot of compassion for their needs. Our heart goes out to them in their need. But it has to go on from there to believing God can do something about human situations. Compassion linked with faith in God's love and power is powerful in bringing His power into the situations for which we pray and may become involved.

Jesus was about to set him free. Mark records that Jesus said to the man but addressing the evil spirit, "*Come out of this man you evil spirit.*" The man's reply was both a challenge to Jesus' authority and also a request that he might not be tormented by Jesus. "*What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.*" When Jesus asked him his name, he could only reply, **30** ... "*Legion,*" (Luke adds, "*for many demons had entered him*".) He had many evil spirits who tormented him, and made him act in such self-destructive ways. The spirits knew that Jesus had the authority to set the man free of their influence, and so they begged that He might not command them to depart into the abyss. We read what happened. **32** *Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33 Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.* The man had been healed. The demons were gone.

### **3. GOD WORKS WITH TRACE ELEMENTS (OF FAITH). 30-33**

Where was the faith for this wonderful deliverance? A trace within the man, and Jesus' faith.

He came to Jesus and knelt before Him, in spite of all the evil spirits he had. It must have been a battle for him to come to Jesus and to kneel before Him. Those who have been affected in any way by the powers of darkness, testify as to how difficult it is to become involved with Christian things. For some it takes a tremendous effort to even enter a church, or to open a Bible.

The man was healed. We see the evidence of his healing in that a little later he was sitting there at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. He was no longer under the influence of the demonic. He was now committed to Jesus.

### **4. DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO THE HEALING POWER OF GOD**

Not everyone is comfortable with the demonstration of the power of God.

**a. Fear and reaction.** Here the local inhabitants become fearful, and perhaps even resentful. They valued the lives of pigs more than the value of one human made in the image of God. It's as though they told Him, *No more healings, Jesus. Just get out and stay out of our town. You've done enough damage today. We don't want you around the place.*

A wonderful deliverance had just taken place. A man had been released and set free. He was rejoicing at what God had done. They were furious at what God had done. Who was captive now? Not the man. They were, in their anger at his healing because it had meant the loss of their pigs.

**b. Gratitude and heartfelt response. 38-39.**

*38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him.* He knew this was God at work through Jesus. He wanted to throw in his lot with the ongoing ministry of Jesus.

Recognition of what God has done for us should release us from the captivity we may be in to selfishness, to materialism, to the occult, or to some other religion which does not give its rightful place to Jesus.

He said to Jesus, "Let me be with you Jesus." The locals having seen the same demonstration of the power of God said "Clear out Jesus and leave us alone." What would your response or reaction be to God touching the lives of the most unlikely people around you? CS Lewis spoke of God as the "Transcendental Interferer" who actually does things in His world. If He worked in our lives or in our families or in our churches, would we be fearful or grateful? Our prayer life depends on our answer.

## **5. THE SONG OF THE SOUL SET FREE. 39**

The man is healed. *Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.*

What amazing grace. What amazing love. What amazing power to release so quickly someone who had been captured by evil and released to love and serve the Lord. Jesus encouraged the man to go home to his friends and to bear witness to what the Lord had done for him. He began to do that in the 10 cities and surrounding districts, so that all people marvelled.

A former pagan witnessing to those still outside the kingdom of God. A man touched by the power of God is used by Him to touch the lives of many others.

I don't believe we're to major on thinking about deliverance in this incident. The story is told matter-of-factly to show how a demonised man is set free by Jesus from the powers of darkness to become what God created him to be, and to bear witness to Jesus. What the story does bring out in detail, is the incredible change that was needed in the man, and how the Lord's power effected that change as he humbled himself before Jesus.

You may think that you or a loved one are in a hopeless situation. Others may have told you that you are or gave you that impression.

For us the madman would always be a madman. God saw Him as being clothed and in his right mind.

God's vision for the man came into being through Jesus as Jesus ministered to him. Our God is the God who bothers to go to the extremities, to the impossible situations and there to demonstrate His love and power in transforming people or their situations.

Some years ago as I preached on Mark's account of this incident, I mentioned the amazing love of God in reaching out to those in deep degradation. A woman in the congregation suddenly realised that God could do something in her own degraded situation. Next day she asked for help. She was soon transformed by the power of God. People were amazed at the incredible change in her and were delighted at what God had done in her life so quickly.

Let's invite Him to do that now in your situation as you place yourself in His hands.