

## Children's sermon (truck)

(It could) be the Bible's best imitation of Gilligan's Island! After a late night storm blew their fishing (boat) off course, and after waking Jesus up from his sound sleep, and after he calmed the storm and went back to sleep by the time the sun (came) up their boat was beached. This is the tale of that fateful trip.....

Unlike Gilligan's Island, this place was inhabited....and on that beach the inhabitant was, well, unique. Imagine a Wildman, hair everywhere, (eyes) wildly open, beard caked by spit and drool, naked dude living among the graves! Imagine the most demonic-stereotype you can....and this guy was it!

While Mark is the shortest of the Gospels, he commits 20 verses to this odd story. But, this story is essential for us to understand who Jesus is, and why he has come to us. (In the) brief verses prior to this story we are told that his disciples, fearful that they would die in the storm, (awakened) him from his sleep. Jesus calmed the (storm,) and the disciples' response was "who is this who can still a storm?" They didn't get it. Yet, Jesus is preparing them to bring the Word of God to their neighborhoods. Did they get it? Um, no!

Enter the wild man (of the) tombs....Not only is he out of control, he's extremely strong breaking the chains that were wrapped around him. Wild, hairy, loud, naked, dirty, and strong. Got the picture?

So, let me ask. Do you have someone like that in your life? They may have a mental health issue. They may be a politician, or a chronically unemployed in-law, or a nosey, noisy neighbor, or an immigrant. (In our) world today, demonizing people is a pretty common activity. It has become pretty easy to publicly defame someone you don't like. The effect of that common practice tears at the fabric of our society.

(I imagine) the people who lived in the nearby village knew this guy. And my guess is they were only too happy to tell you of all his issues. Did he know what it meant to be demonized and cast-out?

(While) the disciples stayed with the boat to protect their stuff, Jesus walked toward the man....while he ran full out straight at Jesus. Did you hear what he said? ("What) do you want from us....wait for it....(Jesus), son of the most high God?" Who (knows) who this Jesus is? The disciples? Nope. The villagers? Nope. This wild man, not necessarily. (The evil) spirit in him? Absolutely!!! And that spirit speaks the secret out loud! This is amazing!

See, (Jesus) has been getting the disciples ready to bring the Word of God to strangers they will encounter. So, he shows them how this gift of grace and mercy will work. Jesus asks what this man's name is...and (he says) "I am legion." His real name was Rodney, but no one had called him that in years. Now a (legion) was a Roman army unit comprised of 1,000 soldiers. How many evil spirits dwell in this guy? Many, more than we could count. Who knows (how bad) this guy is? Everybody! Everybody knows! Is he beyond redeeming? Is he lost in his sin? Maybe...

(But,) Jesus is the son of the most high God. And Jesus meets the Legion, every last one of them. And on their own they are small, insignificant matters, but together they can wear you down. Does Jesus (heap) guilt on this guy? You should be ashamed of yourself. Can you hear that? I am so disappointed in you! Nope. What we do hear is a quiet whisper of mercy for a legion of sins. (You have been) mercified. You are forgiven!

Mark's goal in including this detailed story is to show us how broad the love of God is. That truth echoes through Paul's prayer in Ephesians that Brigitte read for us. I pray that you will experience the presence of Christ more and more in your hearts...so that you would be moved to welcome those who have been (cast out)...not welcomed...not loved...not respected.

And may your (roots) go deep into the love of God so that you will be able to recognize this. (Jesus) mercified Rodney. He gave him forgiveness and in that moment Rodney came to his right mind. The wild, uncontrolled spirit of sin and darkness had been removed from him. And Rodney was (made) whole.

That's what Paul was trying to tell the folks at Ephesus. He said you know how big God's love is for all of you. I've told you often that you are loved, (even) when the world says you are not. You are welcome even though the world says don't even try. You are more than enough to receive mercy and grace. And when you finally see that....can you imagine what this church could do....when every one of y'all experienced that fullness of God's love. Can you imagine that this church could be the (starting) place for healing. Who is welcome here? All who have been hurt, or scarred, or betrayed. Come to this place of mercy. All who have been judged.... From the music you like, to the doubts you have, or your history of abuse or addiction, or the hearts or lives that you have destroyed. Can you imagine if New Spirit lived into that name....as a place where healing can begin?

That is Paul's invitation. Hey, you, yah you...you (know) grace got you don't you? You don't? Well, let me put it this way....Legion's (world) was pretty small. See, he always carried the walls that others had built for him. You are ugly. You are stupid. You will never amount to anything. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You are going to hell. That was his world, and it was so small and so lonely. (Then).....Jesus. He sat down with Legion, and invited him out of that small, cramped life....and what do you think he saw? How high, how wide, how deep, how colorful love can be! Once he saw that, do you (think) Rodney would ever crawl back into his little life? Lots of people do!

You know that God has already (said you) are awesome. You know that God has already forgiven you, mercified you of all your dumb, stupid, and foolish choices....and because of that.... you have a holy responsibility now... And that is to mercify the people you meet, like Legion.

That is exactly what Jesus told Rodney he had to do. (Go back) home, Rodney, and forgive those people. Show them the mercy you have received, and they shall be transformed, too. Promise.

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