



Meditation— Mark 5.¹⁻⁵

¹And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. ²And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, ³who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: ⁴because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. ⁵And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

“Possession” is most often interpreted as one independent life force being invaded and controlled by one or more other independent life forces. It is abundantly clear that in the pre-scientific world, such “possession” was more than rhetorical explanation. The phenomenon of “possession” was viewed as a literal reality. It is also clear that such phenomena were thought to be not uncommon.

The Greek word for “demon,” usually associated with an “evil” spirit, is *daimon*. It might surprise the reader to know that this word, *daimon*, “demon,” refers to both good and evil influences. It can refer to a deity as well as an “evil” spirit. Zeus, for example, was a *daimon* in the Greek mind. Other Greek Gods such as Apollo, Ares, Hera, Aphrodite, and Dionysus were also called, *daimon*. The idea of *daimon*, then, was not so much about “evil” as it was about “power,” “force,” “control,” or “influence.” *Daimon* was indicative of an overwhelming force or influence. Of course, an “evil” *daimon* was an overwhelming power, force, or influence that was destructive. It was one that distorted an individual’s view of self and the world around them.

To my knowledge, I have never had experience with the phenomenon of literal and traditional “possession” or an individual under the influence of another life force. I have, however, had experience myself and witnessed in others great emotional, psychological, and spiritual disturbances. In some, these have stemmed from influences and powers that were overwhelming and nearly or completely uncontrollable. Wherever the truth lies about the traditional and literal form of “possession,” I do believe that what we identify as powerful and overwhelming emotional and psychological disturbances today would have been interpreted as instances of “possession” in the ancient world.

In today’s reading, we meet a man whose view of himself had become so distorted by negative influences in and upon his life, that he was suicidal. This is what I understand the text to be telling us when it reports that the man “had his dwelling among the tombs.” He wished to be dead. To my mind, the text’s report that he was often found “cutting himself with stones” confirms his suicidal feelings and that he had acted on his desire for death by attempting suicide on multiply occasions.

In addition to having a distorted and negative view of himself, the man had a distorted view of others. This caused him to be seen as a threat and caused those who deemed him a threat to attempt to control him in order to reduce the threat. This is the meaning behind the text’s report that he was “often bound

with fetters and chains.” However, the influences that were so overwhelming in his own life made it impossible for others to control him or the threat he posed. This is the meaning behind the text’s report that he “plucked asunder” the chains by which he was bound and that “neither could any man tame him.”

For me, here is the bottom line. This is what I learn from this inspired text. The world is full of evil influences, forces, and powers that distort individual’s view of themselves and of those around them to the point that they can become, a) suicidal and b) murderous. These influences are sometimes beyond individual’s or even society’s ability to control. Today, we see these influences at work in our own lives, in the lives of those closest to us, and in millions of our fellow national and global citizens. Unfortunately, we are hastening toward, indeed have already entered the initial stages of a time when so many are overcome by these overwhelming, dehumanizing influences that our entire society, the whole global family will experience complete societal madness, the distortion being so pervasive that self-destructive behavior, mass suicide, and mass killing become the order of the day.

And, finally, as we will see as the narrative progresses, there is only one solution to the problem. There is only one who has the power to take control, cast out the *daimon*, the overwhelming influences, and heal the individual and society. That One is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, Savior and King. We will, then, want to listen to and watch him carefully as the narrative progresses. Our life, the life of those we love, the sanity of the entire planet may depend upon it.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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