

The writer John Killinger, tells a powerful story about a man who is alone in a hotel room in Canada. The man's so depressed that he can't be bothered to go downstairs to the restaurant to eat. He was the chairman of a large shipping company and a man with power and influence; but at this moment he's completely overwhelmed by the pressures of life. All of his life he's been a worrier, always anxious about business, but now he feels he's at the end of his tether. He thinks to himself: *Life isn't worth living this way, I wish I were dead*; and then he feels guilty at what God would think if he knew his thoughts. Speaking aloud he says: *God, life's a joke, isn't it?* Suddenly, it occurs to him that this is the first time he's talked to God since he was a child. He's silent for a moment and he begins to pray. He described how he talked out loud, telling God about the mess his life was in and how tired he was. He said that he wanted things to be different in his life. And then in the silence of his hotel room he heard a voice, or was it a thought; saying ***It doesn't have to be that way!*** He sat up and wondered was he hearing things? But then he was absolutely certain he's heard those words: *It doesn't have to be that way!*

He went home and told his wife what happened. He asked his brother in law who was a minister: *Do you think God was speaking to me?* His brother in law said: *Of course, because that's the message of God to you and everyone of us, that's the Gospel message. That's why Jesus Christ came into the world to save and deliver us, to free us and change us; and to show us that 'It doesn't have to be that way,' Your life doesn't have to be hopeless. Jesus Christ can turn your life around if you will welcome Him into your heart, He'll make you a new person.*

That's what the story in Mark 5 is about. Christ walks into the tormented life of the Gerasene demoniac, this madman whose life is coming apart at the seams; and He turns his life around. He gives this tormented man a new beginning and a new birth.

The beginning of this narrative reads like a horror story. This wild eyed, adrenalin filled madman comes running and shrieking out of the tomb. He's clearly unbalanced, and he's convinced that he is being held captive by a whole legion of demons who are pulling at him in every direction. This is a frightening situation!

Jesus and His disciples have just come through the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and having survived the storm they're pleased to be on solid ground. But as they get out of the boat, they encounter a different kind of storm; another scary experience. They hear strange sounds coming from the tombs; shrieks and screams and rattling of chains. Then suddenly; this poor man in tattered clothes, bruised, battered and dirty with chains hanging from him, comes running and screaming directly toward them! This would have been a frightening moment because this was a powerful and dangerous man charging at them. But not Jesus wasn't fazed! He stood His ground and faced the man. Undaunted and unafraid, Jesus challenged and healed him. He brought peace to his troubled soul. He healed him and turned his life around. Jesus can do the same for us!

The man said his name was Legion and that's a military word, and its appropriate because this man was at war. He was at war with himself, he was at war with other people and he was at war with God. His name was Legion, and he was fighting everyone. But Jesus entered into his life, and in essence said to him: ***It doesn't have to be that way!*** This is the message we need to hear today? Is there something in your life that needs to be changed? Do you feel like Legion, being pushed and pulled in so many directions that you're out of control? Do you feel that life is a constant battle? If so; Jesus Christ has a word for us today. He's speaking loud and clear to each of us and He's saying: ***It doesn't have to be that way!***

Lets lift three ideas out of this story from Mark five: ***First: We Don't Have To Be At War With ourselves - It doesn't have to be that way!***

The Gerasene demoniac was at war with himself. He was hurting himself, bruising himself, injuring himself and how often we do that! Sometimes we act in ways that hurt ourselves and others, and our attitudes or behaviour causes us to alienate ourselves from other, often those who are closest to us and love us. This may manifest itself in our not trusting others or stubbornly holding onto a grudge, or withholding forgiveness for some slight we suffered. We know we are acting in a way that makes us unhappy, and that we would love to be reconciled with people, but our pride won't allow us to let go of whatever it is that is hurting us, and others. I've seen people behave like this so often, and I have behaved like this myself in the past.

Having reflected on my own behaviour, and observed others acting like this, I've come to the conclusion that the underlying problem is that we don't like ourselves very much, and that affects everything we do. We are at war with ourselves and this distorts our relationships. On the other hand, when we feel good about ourselves, we're more loving and patient, more thoughtful and gracious toward everyone. We need to feel good and like ourselves a little more! If we want to stop hurting ourselves and sense an inner peace, then remember that you are special to God. He loves you! You are extremely valuable to Him! He claims you as His child! You don't have to be at war with yourself; It doesn't have to be that way. You are special to God and that makes you supremely valuable.

Second, You Don't Have To Be At War With Other People - It doesn't have to be that way! In Mark five, Legion was very much at war with other people. He'd been cast out of society, chained and shackled then exiled to the tombs, constantly battling with other people. When he runs out toward Jesus and His disciples he's looking for a fight! Isn't it amazing how estranged and isolated hostile people can get? When will we ever learn? When will we ever learn to befriend one another, to respect one another, to love one another?

A newspaper had an article about a young man from a wealthy family who was about to graduate from university. It was the custom in that affluent neighbourhood for the parents to give the person graduating a car. The boy and his father had spent months looking at cars and the week before graduation they found the perfect car. The boy knew that when he graduated the car would be his. After the graduation ceremony, the boy's father handed him a gift-wrapped Bible! The boy was furious and he threw the Bible down and stormed out the house. He and his father never spoke or saw each other again.

When his parents died, the boy who was now a man, came home. He was going through his father's possessions when he came across the Bible. He brushed away the dust and opened it to find a cheque dated the day of his graduation for the exact amount of the car they had chosen together! Isn't that sad? Isn't that tragic? I hope the man read that Bible, because it has many lessons he needed to learn, and that all of us need to learn, one of them being: You don't have to be at war with other people. *It doesn't have to be that way!*

Third: You Don't Have To Be At War With God - It doesn't have to be that way. In Mark 5, Legion is cut off from God. *What have you to do with me? Don't torment me*, he says to Jesus.

Years ago, I was playing with my nephew Alasdair who would have been about four at the time. We were playing his favourite game which was fighting. As we were wrestling, I accidentally hit Alasdair in the face with my elbow. It was a quite a heavy blow full in his face. If you've ever been in that situation, you will know that there is a moment when everything stands still. Alasdair was stunned by the impact of my elbow. It hurt, and he was about to burst into tears. But then he looked into my eyes and instead of seeing anger or hostility, he must have seen my sympathy and concern. He saw my love and compassion. Then, instead of exploding into tears, the little boy suddenly burst into laughter. What he saw in his uncles eyes made all the difference!

This is why Jesus is so important to us. He lets us look into His Father's eyes! When we read the Bible and look at Jesus, we see what God is like, and what God wants us to be like! Jesus shows us the love and compassion and the empathy in His Father's eyes. That's the good news of our faith: Jesus reveals that God looks at us not with angry, vengeful or condemning eyes, but with the eyes of a loving Father. So we don't have to be at war with ourselves, we don't have to be at war with other people, we don't have to be at war with God. We have a God who loves us so much, that He sent His only Son to die that we may be forgiven our sins and have freedom from death and perfect eternal life. What an amazing God, and what an amazing offer we are given through Jesus.

Of course, this offer can only be received if we recognise our sin and ask for forgiveness, and we can only do that if we are peace with ourselves, at peace with others and find peace in God. If we can find this peace then Jesus will come into our lives just as He came into Legion's life, and He will come saying: ***It doesn't have to that way!*** **Amen**

(1732 words)