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*the One with all the questions:
Who Are You?
Mark 5: 1-20*

When Cyndi became pregnant with our firstborn, we knew exactly what the names would be. If it was a girl, Rachel Megan and if it was a boy, Cooper James. But we didn't know what we were going to have so, while Cyndi was pregnant, we just called the baby, "Humma." Get it? Humma Toone. Of course I talked about "Humma" in my sermons for months. Finally one morning, a very concerned older lady couldn't take it any longer. She came up to me, obviously distressed, and blurted out: "Please don't name your baby 'Humma.' That's an awful name for a child." I finally convinced her that it was just a joke. And when we had our little girl, "Humma" became "Rachel Megan Toone."

One of the things that keeps us from sharing the Good News about Jesus is that we think we must have all the answers. Jesus proved, however, that you can have meaningful spiritual conversations just by asking good questions. This morning's question seems as simple as they come: "What is your name?" But that question transformed what may be the most pathetic character you will find in the Bible.

[Read Mark 5: 1-20]

I need a volunteer; strong guy with lots of muscles. *[Hand chains to volunteer]* Do me a favor: would you mind just pulling this apart? Just a couple of links will make my point. Go ahead. No? Not strong enough to pull apart a chain? Well, not many could. But the guy in today's story could. In fact, Mark is so impressed that he repeats himself: ³This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. ⁴For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him.

This guy was freaky-strong. But there's more. He lived in a tomb. They carved stone beds out of the walls of caves, and that's where they laid their dead bodies. Our freaky strong man found a cave with an empty stone bed, and that's where he slept... right next to corpses. Scary, huh? There's more. Night and day, this tormented soul screamed in pain at the top of his lungs. And he was a cutter. One of the issues we face with teenagers today is the phenomenon of "cutting"; kids carve on themselves with razor blades because their lives are so numb, they want to feel something. This man was a cutter. He took jagged pieces of stone and sliced his flesh until the blood streamed.

Weird enough yet? Well, let's top off the weirdness: he didn't wear clothes. He ran around buck naked. So, this man who is so violently disturbed that his friends try to control him with chains—which he snaps them like plastic spoons. He runs around naked, sleeps with dead bodies, carves on his own flesh and screams like a banshee, night and day. Wow!

And what was the cause of this tormented behavior? Verse 2. He was a "...man with an evil spirit." This poor man was ravaged by demonic forces. Can you think of a more tormented soul in the Bible?

Now, the rest of the story: Jesus and His disciples climb out of their boat after sailing across the Sea of Galilee to the area called the Decapolis or "Ten Cities." This was Gentile country. Jews didn't belong here! And our story proves the point, doesn't it? How? Pigs! What self-respecting Jewish village would have a herd of 2,000 pigs?

By the time the disciples set foot on this Gentile soil, they were already pretty frazzled. Remember, the boat trip over wasn't exactly smooth sailing, was it? They were nearly capsized by a storm. Jesus took care of it, of course. He told the winds to be quiet, and they were. But not before the boys faced their own "Titanic" moment. I suspect they were very relieved to walk on dry land—even Gentile dry land—until they saw something that made them want to jump back into the boat and row for their lives.

At first, they only hear him. Howling in the distance. Then, they see him. Stark naked, scarred, filthy, bleeding and running... sprinting right toward them. Running and screaming his head off. The closer he gets, the louder the screams and the more terrified they are. His eyes are wild. They are convinced that he is going to kill them for stepping on his beach.

The disciples cringed as this savage approached them. But not Jesus. He just stood there calmly waiting. The wild man ran right up to Jesus, and then—in a bizarre twist—suddenly threw himself to the ground at Jesus' feet. As a matter of fact, the word used to describe this is the very same word used to describe what the magi did when they discovered Jesus in Bethlehem. He fell on his face as if in worship! The word can even mean to lick, like a dog licking its master's hand. In other words, it describes an act of total submission. This man under the control of evil—this man who could not be bound, could not be chained, could not be subdued by any human being—throws himself at the feet of Jesus, fawning like a whipped dog before his master.

Why? The evil spirits are terrified of Jesus. They know who He is. They know that they have met their match and their Master. They beg Jesus—if he is going to cast them out—to send them into a nearby herd of pigs. Jesus agrees. Not because he pities the evil beings inside this man. But perhaps because the man needed to see the reality of his own deliverance in vivid terms.

Anyway, without any hoopla or incantations, Matthew tells us Jesus simply said, "Go!" and the demons left the man and went into the pigs. They had no choice. The Master had spoken. So what happened next? Yep. They took a swine dive. There is a cliff near this village which overlooks the eastern shore of Galilee. Can you imagine 2,000 pigs—that's more than 2 pigs for every person here—flying off of that cliff and into the water? Bobbing for bacon.

Of course the townsfolk were furious. This was their livelihood. They stormed off to find who was responsible and could not believe their eyes. Here was a strange Jewish rabbi with 12 followers, and seated in front of him, dressed and in his right mind, was their demoniac... who had now been set free.

I want to bring us back to our theme for this series: the One with all the questions. So what was Jesus' question to this man? What is your name? It may not seem like a very profound question, but when you think about the context, it was remarkable! If I saw a naked, scarred, bleeding, crazy man running toward me at full speed, screaming at the top of his lungs, I don't think the first question out of my mouth would be, "Hey... ummm... what's your name?" But it proves to be a transformational question.

The Greek is in the second person singular. In other words, he is asking the man—the human being—"What is your name?" But who answers? The demons inside of him. How do they respond? "Our name is Legion for we are many." Legion was the name for an army of 6,000 Roman soldiers. What they were saying was, "We are an army of demons living inside this man."

Now let me ask this: do you think this man's momma named him "Legion" when he was born? Who gave him that name? The evil spirits inside of him? Or maybe the townspeople who grew more terrified of him by the minute. When was the last time someone asked this man his name? No one cared! They were terrified of him. They didn't want to know anything more about him. No one was interested in his name.

But Jesus was. There is something humanizing about this question. Something personal. This man had become a terror to his neighbors... an object of contempt or fear or pity or all of the above. Evil had stolen his real name and given him a counterfeit. Legion! But now, perhaps for the first time in years, someone asks that simple, human question: What is your name? And he cannot even speak. He has lost his identity. Stolen by others. Angry neighbors. Evil spirits. He cannot define himself because others already have. He has lost his name.

What is the underlying question here? "What is your name?" What is the question behind that question? "Who are you? Who are you really?" Most of us received names that our parents thought sounded good, or we were named after a relative. But in the Bible, names mean something. Names are identity. God often renamed his people, to reinforce His covenant with them. Abram became Abraham, "Father

of Many." Sarai became Sarah, "woman of high rank." Jacob—which means "trickster"—became Israel, "He Wrestles with God." Simon became Peter: "The Rock!" Saul became Paul which means "little." In every instance God was saying, "I know what your parents named you. I know what the world calls you. I have a new name for you."

Jesus asks this pitiful man, "What is your name? Who are you?" The answer Jesus longs to hear from him, and from us, is this: I am beloved child of God, created in his image, redeemed by His grace, and called to his purpose. But this poor man has surrendered his identity. He doesn't know who he is any more. He can't even speak for himself. Society has named him. His demons have named him. His addictions have named him.

"What is your name? Who are you?" It is the first question we ask a stranger. "What is your name?" It ought to be our first question when we share the good news of Jesus with others. If we approach evangelism as a procedure or a technique or a one-size-fits-all formula, it won't work. People will realize that we don't really care about who they are, and they will feel manipulated. And until we know who they really are—until they know we care—we won't be able to speak into the depth of their life.

I have a friend who does not go to church. He is a Christian but he was wounded by the church and can't get past it. But he is my friend and we hang out a lot. Last week I saw him in a situation where someone accused him of something he had not done. They even reported him to someone in authority. He responded quietly to their charges at the time, but afterwards I watched as he became more and more furious. He was literally shaking and red as he said these words: "I hate bullies. I hate being bullied. When I was in the second grade, ten kids dog piled on me and, when I fought back, I got in trouble."

The more he talked, the angrier he became. "I hate bullies. I hate being bullied." And suddenly, some of our previous conversations made sense to me: a landlord trying to take advantage of him, a partner trying to take advantage of him, a pastor who took advantage of him. If you ask my friend what his name is right now, it might be, "Bullied." Do you think this is worth knowing before I talk to my friend about Jesus or church? Knowing that he has felt manipulated throughout his life? That the last thing he needs is to feel spiritually bullied by one more pastor?

I spoke with a woman this week whose good friend, a non-believer, is a highly-placed executive who is one year from retirement. And she is terrified. She cannot imagine life without her career. She told my friend, "As I look into the future, my whole life is an abyss. It is only about endings. There are no beginnings left." If you ask her what her name is right now, what might it be? "Abyss." Do you think it will be helpful for my friend to understand this hopelessness and despair? Do you think it will inform the way she shares Jesus with this unbeliever?

What is **your** name? Do you realize how many people cannot answer that for themselves? They have taken the name that others have given them. Loser. Addict. Slut. Failure. Fanatic. They wear the chains of identity that others have placed upon them...and they have lost their own voice. They can't even speak for themselves. Or maybe no one has ever cared enough to ask the question... and wait for the answer. Maybe **you** need to answer this question today... for yourself. What is your name? What is your identity? What are the chains you wear that others have placed upon you? We live in a culture that devalues, debases and destroys human life. Any name—any identity that comes from anyone other than your creator—is a counterfeit. What is your name? Who are you?

The amazing thing about this story is this: the very question itself was transformational. Jesus spoke only four words to the man. "What is your name?" That question caused his tortured soul to resurface... to fight for his identity against the evil that wanted to destroy him. To seek Jesus, who alone could set him free. "What is your name?" Jesus asked. And then, all hell broke loose. What hell needs to break loose in you? Or what chains need to come off of your friend? You don't need all the answers. But in this Year of Good News, you will not find a better starting question than this: Who are you? Tell me; what is your name?

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. Jesus asked the man, "What is your name." Who replied? How is it that people lose their identity?
 2. What is your name? If you were to pick a name to describe who you are right now, what would it be? And what do you long for it to be? What do you think God longs for your name to be?
 3. How does this question, "What is your name," help us in our Good-News-sharing? What is the key point?