

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**

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**First Presbyterian Church**

**Clarksburg, WV**

**Mark 5:1-20**

*Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many."*  
(Mark 5:9 N.R.S.V.)

## **A Man Named Many**

In today's New Testament lesson we meet a man named Many. I didn't say Manny, but Many, M-A-N-Y. Many was a tragic figure, a tortured soul if ever there was one. "He is not right in the head," local people said. Some of the villagers tried to capture and tie Many up. They did it for his own safety, . . . and theirs too. But with the kind of power that only someone so torn of mind can possess, Many broke all their ropes and even their chains. People were terrified of Many. He was a scary guy. So they took to pelting him with stones and sticks whenever he tried to come close.

Many took to hiding behind the gravestones. At night he would run howling down the lake shore, his torn clothes flying in the wind and revealing his grime caked body beneath. Many was so unhappy and torn that he would beat himself with rocks and sticks. He was in aguish!

Then Jesus comes on the scene. There was something about Jesus that attracted Many. Perhaps it was the simple fact that Jesus did not run away. When Jesus saw Many, he did not look away as others had always done. Jesus looked at Many with compassion.

Many was still afraid, but he came to Jesus anyway. Notice the first thing out of Many's mouth was, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."

Maybe he thought that Jesus might beat him, as others had done before. Or perhaps he feared that Jesus would offer him hope of healing and then fail to deliver it, as others had done before.

We don't know what Many's illness was for certain. Demon possession as it is described in scripture is poorly understood today. It is likely that today, Many, would be diagnosed as having a mental illness. We are really not sure.

When Jesus asked him his name, he said, "My name is Legion; for we are many." That is the translation most of us are familiar with. The word legion was a designation for a military unit of between 3,000 and 6,000 men. In this case, it meant more than a few. It meant a lot, or many.

So the tormented man's answer could be translated as, "My name is Many, because there are lots and lots of us."

I have chosen to use the name, Many. While "Legion" is a kind of vague term, many is term all of us can understand. Furthermore, "many" is a term that we can relate to our own lives. You don't have to be mentally ill to feel pulled in different directions. All of us play many roles in our lives, and the roles we play sometimes threaten to pull us apart.

We are sons and daughters. We are husbands and wives. We are fathers and mothers. We are employees and bosses. We are teachers and coaches and role models. Sometimes life comes at us so fast that we are not sure what we are supposed to be. Sometimes the roles we play contradict each other. As our parents get older and more frail, we may find ourselves needing to be a parent to our parents while at the same time still being their child.

Sometimes our identity as Christians pulls us in one direction while our work identity pulls us in another. What do you do when your boss orders you to lie and cheat?

Then there are the emotional demands that come with many of today's jobs. The waitress is supposed to appear cheerful and helpful even when she is going through a messy divorce and she is worried about what is going to happen to her kids. And the customers are being a pain in the you know what! Still she is to smile and at least appear to be gracious.

The teacher must remain polite and firm even when dealing with the parent from hades. The surgeon must project confidence and calmness even when he or she is a total mess inside.

This having to pretend to be something we are not, is stressful. The greater the difference between how we really feel and what we are pretending to feel, the greater the stress. No wonder we sometimes feel pulled apart.

So, yes, we understand what it means to be "many." In today's scripture, Jesus heals the man named Many. When the villagers came they were surprised and impressed to see Many sitting calmly at Jesus's feet. He was calm and in his right mind.

Here then is the good news. When we are being pulled apart, Christ brings us healing. He makes us one with him.

Christ brings us a calm center which we can hold onto even in the midst of emotional storms and upheavals in our lives. In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul writes, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Hang on to that: God has given us a spirit, not of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

In a few minutes we are going to celebrate the baptism of little Ty. In that sacrament, God will claim Ty as his own child. No matter where Ty may go as he grows up, no matter what he may do or fail to do, his identity is secure - he is a child of God.

That promise is the central claim in the life of every Christian. When you start feeling adrift and are being pulled in every direction at once, remember who you are. You are a child of God. Keep that identity as your spiritual center, and you will know the peace of God, the peace that passes all understanding.

When you are afraid that you can't make it on your own, remember that you are not alone. You are a child of God, and God will never abandon you. Not only that, but God has promised to help us, not just with the difficult things, but with the impossible things as well. As Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:10, "With God all things are possible."

When you are feeling down on yourself and others are saying you are not worthy. Remember your baptism. You are of infinite value and worth in the sight of God. God has declared of his children: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of the One who called you out of darkness into God's marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

When you feel pulled in every direction and you feel like you are losing your mind, remember you are a child of God. Hold on to that identity. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7)

Amen.