

The consequences of deliverance

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Transformation often has a price. There is a cost to freedom, even freedom from demons.

The moment Jesus touches his feet down on the land of Gerasenes, a man comes to be set free--and Jesus is there to exceed his expectations. In a moment, one who has been living a long time in the tombs--tormented such that he has needed to be bound in chains--is delivered.

Jesus gives the demons permission to enter the pigs grazing on the hillside--2,000 of them, according to Mark's version of the story. This is not necessarily good news or a deliverance moment for the pigs, which soon drown in the lake. It's an unsettling plot point, and it indicates both the vast numbers of demons residing in the man and their essential nature of seeking to steal, kill, and destroy life (John 10:10).

Deliverance has its consequences. The swineherds run and tell what's happened, but this is not the same kind of running and telling that the woman at the well does in John 4 ("come and see a man who told me everything I've ever done"). This is more like telling on Jesus, describing the horror of seeing all their pigs run into the lake.

When the people come, they see the man they know as the one who has demons and lives in the tombs now "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." The one who once wore no clothes is clothed and in his right mind. Yet "all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them: for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned." Jesus

does what he came to do and isn't received, so he leaves.

What is it that bothers the people most? What causes them to fear? Is it that they can't fully comprehend or believe the miracle? Is it that the man who has been naked and living in the tombs, unruly and uncontrollable, is now clothed and in his right mind? Or that he is sitting at the feet of Jesus?

Perhaps part of their fear is that this man's form of deliverance is, by drowning swine, impacting their economy. If this is what happens when one man encounters Jesus, what will happen if more people are set free?

Deliverance has its consequences. Freedom and change are not always comfortable for everyone. The man who lived in the tombs now has a new identity, a new way of being. How can they relate to him?