

**REVISITING MARK 5:1-20 FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE OF
‘DEALING WITH AITU IN OUR SAMOAN
WORLD AS HEALING’**

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Abstract

The exorcism of the Garasene demoniac is one of the most striking narratives in the New Testament and depicts an intense power struggle between Jesus and a multitude of demons. Although the exorcism is recounted in all of the Synoptic Gospels, the Markan narrative is especially interesting because it includes three significant details. First, the demons attempt to use “name magic” on Jesus; second, they adjure Him by God; and third, Jesus Himself resorts to name magic before He casts out the demons. For ancient readers, the presence of these three details would have been interpreted as limitations of Jesus power. However, this essay is focussing on how Healing was given out by Jesus and its connection to Christianity life in Samoa versus traditional beliefs in ghosts and demons.

Declaration

I declare that this work has not used without due acknowledgment of any material that has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in another institution. I also declare that the work has not used any material, heard or read, without proper acknowledgment of the source.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Dedication

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Introduction

1. Why This Study

I have been always interested in knowing more about the spirits of the dead in the traditional Samoan belief of *aitu* and their connection to Jesus' dealing with *aitu* in Jesus' ministry as told and shown in the Gospels. This interest is the motivation behind this work with the willingness to learn more about the Bible and ways of interpreting the Bible.

2. How This Study

The Samoan people's ancestral belief embraces the importance of the spirit of our ancestors. I have heard many stories from members of my families and villages about their encountering-experience of spirits of our parents (*agaga o matua*) – the spirits that are also called '*Aitu*'. The stories are happy and sad stories. The happy stories tell events of our lived family members being possessed by our passed family members' spirits giving advice in regard to dealing with some family matters. For example, I have witnessed a woman who was possessed by a spirit in our village. The spirit through this woman said she was happy with the family decision to bestow upon one of her brothers the highest *matai* title of their family. The sad stories speak of events where some people have lost their lives because of the power of these possessed spirits. For example, a friend told me a story about one of his uncles who passed away because he was possessed by an angry spirit of a family member. The angry spirit was not happy with his uncle's shifting the boundary marks of the extended family lands. From these stories, there are *aitu* considered as good *aitu* in Samoa. However, the arrival of the missionaries in Samoa brought with them the belief that all spirits of the

dead as *aitu* in Samoa are not good spirits. They are demons – especially the spirits of the dead seen and heard roaming around on family and village lands.

This thesis aims to revisit the ministry of Jesus, exploring Jesus' dealing with the possessive spirits, seeking some answers to some of the questions I have on this topic. I do not call the spirits of my ancestors the bad spirits. I believe that I feel their presence everywhere I go – their presence to protect me. It does not take away the importance of my considering of the Holy Spirit as the main Spirit I rely upon in my life. The questions are: Are there various and different types of spirits of the dead? If there are, which are the spirits Jesus dealt with in his ministry? Jesus' casting out of the demons in his ministry is a healing ministry, is not this seen in the Samoan traditional healers' dealing with the sick possessed with the spirits of the dead? In doing so, our Samoan stories and life experiences of encountering *aitu* or spirits of the dead will be used as a worldview to analyse my interpretation of Jesus' exorcism of demoniac spirits. The result of this analysis would bring about a realisation of whether there are functions of the spirits of the dead in our Samoan social and cultural worlds.

The objectives of the study are fivefold. One is to consider this research as a way of practising the exercise of studying the Bible with life experiences from my Samoan context. Two is to take this study as an opportunity to explore if there are different types of spirits of the dead in the context/s in which Jesus' ministry occurred. Three is to explore in our Samoan contexts the similar question – for example is the good spirit of the dead. Four, if there are good and not good spirits of the dead, how can we describe or explain them in a way that makes sense both the meaning of Jesus' ministry, and the meaning of the Samoan beliefs in the spirits of their ancestors and parents. Five, this is an opportunity to explore the Gospel of Mark, the gospel considers as the main source of all the Gospels.

3. Chapters Outline

The thesis will be divided into four Chapters. In Chapter One, I will give a background of the Samoan beliefs in the spirits of the dead and their impact on the Samoan people living life in their worlds. This is seen in the Samoans healing of the people possessed by the spirits of the dead considered *tagata ulu ai le aitu*. Thus, I will begin this Chapter with telling stories from my families, village and friends on good *aitu* and bad *aitu* which are known by how the *taulasea* as Samoan traditional healers deal with these sick people. These stories are important because they show how Samoan traditional medicine made out of the Samoan vegetation and other healing practices as social, cultural, and religious practices bring healing not only to the sick person but also to the family and village. This is followed by an explanation of the method of the reading used in this study. It is a reading response exercise from my Samoan social and cultural understanding of *aitu* and how to deal with them to an interpretation of Mark 5:6-13 made in this thesis. Thus, the thesis explores how my understanding of how the Samoans deal with *aitu* in our world could help make more sense Jesus dealing with demons in his ministry. Chapter Two is the background of Mark setting the platform of the exegesis. Chapter Three is the exegesis of the selected. This is followed by my response to that exegesis from my Samoan understanding of dealing with *aitu* in our Samoan social and cultural world which is the Conclusion to the study in Chapter Four.

Chapter 1

Samoa beliefs in the Spirits of the dead and the Reader

Response approach

1.1 Introduction

This Chapter is twofold. On the one hand, it will describe the Samoan beliefs in the spirits of the dead from how the Samoan people view their world. Family and village stories of *aitu* and how Samoan traditional healers deal with people possessed by *aitu* will be told in this part to show dealing with *aitu* in our Samoan world. Part of that Samoa world view is their dealing with the spirits of the dead as a way of life where the spirits of the dead are considered part of their living life. On the other hand, this Chapter will describe the reader response approach as the method of interpretation to be used to explore how my understanding of the Samoan people dealing with the spirits of the dead help make more sense Jesus' exorcism of demons in the Gospel of Mark.

1.2 Samoa beliefs in the Spirit of the Dead

To understand the world of the spirits of the dead in the Samoan social and cultural world, it is important to look at the nature of physical and spiritual forces which influence the life and welfare of the Samoan people. That nature is to be seen from within the framework of the traditional understanding of the world. The Samoans have their own system of beliefs concerning the origin of things and how they have come about. Some of those things are the nature and character of supernatural forces present which influence not only the physical but also the moral and spiritual welfare of the people. These supernatural forces are seen to be deeply rooted in the myths and stories of the traditional Samoan families and villages. That system of beliefs of the Samoan

people did not stop when Christianity arrived. Many traditional beliefs continued to survive and adapted themselves within the new environment of Christianity. For example, in the social and cultural world of the ancient Samoa, the Samoan people practiced and recognized their belief in the interaction between the supernatural and the living where the ancestral spirits and the spirits of the dead were an essential part of family and village life. In discussing important decisions for certain family matters, those spirits' advice were sought. Thus, family gods and *aitu* were considered crucial elements at all levels of the Samoan family or community life.

This is also the way the village *aitu* or *tapuafanua* (the sacred protector of the land) are looked upon by members of a Samoan village. For example, the village of *Fagamalo* in *Savaii* has a village *tapuafanua* or *aitu* named *Tuifiti*. He is known to have lived on a sacred place called *vaosa*. According to Vaitusi Nofoaiga,¹ there is still a desire among the people of *Fagamalo* to get on well with *Tuifiti* their *tapuafanua* or *aitu*. The people of *Fagamalo* continue to practice the custom of casting aside a small portion of food on the commencement of a meal in important occasions occurred in the village, as well as making a libation of 'ava (a ceremonial drink from the root of a plant) as peace offering to *Tuifiti* the *tapuafanua* or *aitu*. Nofoaiga said that this practice is carried out alongside the village's worshipping God as the only God. Nofoaiga added that Reverend Sileli one of the God's servants who served as a church minister in *Fagamalo* spoke in one of the EFKS church minister's renewal fellowship held in *Malua* about how happy he was as church minister of *Fagamalo* with the help of the *tapuafanua Tuifiti*. Sileli said that there were situations where the people who went against the church minister got possessed by *Tuifiti spirit*. In these situations, the spirit

¹ Interview with Rev Dr. Vaitusi Nofoaiga – 21st February 2021

of *Tuifiti* spoke out to the families of the possessed to obey what the church minister says.

However, it is important to acknowledge the church's condemning the belief in the existence of *aitu* and ancestral spirits as contrary to the gospel message in the sovereignty of the one and only God. The church considers the belief of the existence of *aitu* as a violation of the sovereignty of *Atua* as shown in Ex 20:2-4. However, this condemnation as mentioned may only be spoken words among the people because the reality is many Samoans continue to believe in the power of *aitu* and ancestral spirits particularly in matters relating to health and physical well-being. It is the Samoan people's similar understanding of the *Atua* who provides blessing and well-being on the one hand, and on the other inflicts sickness and misfortune upon those who disobey and violate his commandments. Thus, the survival of the traditional spirits alongside the Christian divine understanding of God the only God provides the spiritual framework in which Christians operate today. When one is sick and the causality of sickness is seen to be supernatural, the search for the identity of the spirit is not confined to *aitu* but includes also the possibility of *Atua* inflicting illness and physical pain on a person. Many would acknowledge the *Atua* as the supreme within the new spiritual framework, however, traditional spirits may also have their significant place.

Obviously, dealing with *aitu* from the Samoan traditional understanding of *aitu* there are healers (*taulasea*). In other words, healing is one very important part of the traditional belief of the interaction between the supernatural and the living. In every Samoan village there is a *taulasea*, a traditional healer who has knowledge of the impact of the causality and remedy of *ma'i aitu* (sickness caused by supernatural spirits). As seen in the Samoan health system approved by the government, the traditional healers are allowed to function alongside the modern medical profession. The healers are

considered and recognized as gifted men and women who possessed the ability handed down from generations of family and village healers. There are times the help of the *faife'au* is sought in cases where people suffered from *aitu* possession or from illness considered to be caused by the anger of the Christian *Atua*.

1.3 Defining *Aitu*

Pratt's Samoan Dictionary defines *aitu* as a "spirit, a god, or a feast in honour of a god."² There were *aitu* called *atua* by some Samoan families and villages. Milner's Samoan Dictionary speaks of *aitu* as spirit or ghost with a negative implication. Milner broadens his definition of *aitu* by referring to an evil land as a land that has many *aitu*.³ According to Perelini,⁴ this change of meaning in the development of the meaning of *aitu* from a respectable spirit to a violent and aggressive *aitu* considered as *temoni* (demon), could be looked as an influence of the Christian renunciation of the Samoa traditional belief of *aitu*. The *aitu* are being seen in the same category as the demons and evil spirits mentioned in the gospels – the demons and evil spirits that caused sickness to human beings. However, I argue that the existence of the evil spirits and demons in relation to society in the New Testament as in the Gospel of Mark does not quite have a close similarity to that of the Samoan *aitu*. What this means is that the *aitu* was not looked at as evil. The activities that occurred caused by *aitu* were and still are understood as warnings for the failure of family members to fulfill their responsibilities to a family or to a village. Thus, *aitu* has been considered a representation of a divine order that is related to the spirits of our ancestors within the Samoan society. Their

² G. Pratt, *Grammar and Dictionary*, 75.

³ G. B. Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 34.

⁴ Otele Sili Perelini, "A Comparison of Jesus Healing with Healing in Traditional and Christian Samoa" (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1992), 56-57.

function is to advise members of families and villages to maintain and protect the integrity of their traditions, values, and beliefs. In spite of the negative label given to the traditional belief of *aitu* by the *lotu*, the *aitu* continues to operate as the guardian and protector of Samoan values and beliefs. We have witnessed activities where Samoans possessed by the *aitu* saying that their affliction was caused by their failure to stay with the Christian denomination of their deceased parent. For example, a young man was possessed (by the spirit of his dead father) because the father was not happy with his leaving the Congregational Christian Church and joined the Latter Saints Church. The only hope for him to be cured was to return to his parents' church. Obviously, there are two types of *aitu* that could be considered as good *aitu* and not good *aitu* called *temoni* (demons). According to Jesus ministry, the *aitu* considered as demons are *aitu* influenced by the evil forces or Satan. This belief is accepted by the Samoans in their dealing with *ma'i aitu*.

1.4 Reader Response and Narrative-rhetorical criticism as the reading approach

1.4.1 Reader-Response

For this thesis, I have chosen to use Reader response strategy⁵ as my reading approach. This approach begins from the reader. In this paper, I as the reader ask questions about what *aitu* is in my own world – questions that arise from my own understanding and experience of *aitu* and how curing sickness caused by *aitu* evokes

⁵ In undertaking a biblical interpretation a clear description of a reading method is needed such as Literary Criticism, Socio-Rhetorical Criticism, Reader Response Criticism and others. See Stephen D. Moore, "A Modest Manifesto for New Testament Literary Criticism: How to Interface with a Literary Studies Field That Is Postliterary, Posttheoretical, and Postmethodological," in Stephen D. Moore, *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

hope for the sick – his/her family and community. This part of Reader response approach is called ‘Reception theory’ by Hans Robert Jauss. The theory is about emphasizing the reader’s part in finding the meaning of the text.⁶ This part in the reader-response approach played by the reader is important because there are issues in the story where a response to them is needed. Thus, Reader-response as a reading approach emerged.

Reader response is an interaction between the reader and the text. In this encounter, the reader is regarded related to the text. There are instructions for the reader inside the text to develop interpretation. It is simply about the text relying on the reader to find what it means. For Stanley Fish, the story is meaningless without the reader.⁷ Thus, the role of the reader is important for a story has no meaning unless it is read.

Another scholar of Reader response named Wolfgang Iser utilizes the phrase ‘Implied Reader’ to name the reader now.⁸ For Iser, we as readers now are far distanced from the time and place of the author. There is no supplement text to describe the name and attitude of the author. In other words, we are not actual readers that were there at the time of the author. Thus, we are Implied Readers and our role is to interpret the text, in light of instructions embedded and encoded in the text. This is true when we look at the Bible as a text about events and activities happened long time ago – two thousand years ago. We are unable to find and face the real author because of time and distance in order to know exactly what the text means. Hence, interpreting the text relies heavily on the reader now or the implied reader. Iser as an example speaks of his

⁶ See Hans Robert, Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, translated by Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

⁷ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Harvard: Harvard University, 1982), 272.

⁸ Iser, Wolfgang, Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1978).

interpretation of stars. Isler in that interpretation looks at the text as a constellation. For Isler, when two people look at this constellation, each person will have a different interpretation. One may look at this constellation as a plough, while the other may see it as a bird.⁹ What this means is that, there is one text but two different interpretations.

Thus, there is a need of fusion of horizons of the reader and the text, so that the reader is used to answer questions in or from the story.¹⁰ As such, fusion brings forth the meaning of the text which fills in gaps in the text. For this thesis, I am going to use this approach – Reader response approach – to seek what *aitu* is and its important connection to healing in the selected text (Mark 5:6-13). This task is carried out using the narrative-rhetorical criticism.

1.4.2 Narrative-Rhetorical Criticism

The narrative-rhetorical criticism as the interpretational tool to explore the selected texts is a combination of the narrative criticism and the rhetorical criticism. The narrative criticism¹¹ aims to explore what the story is in the text. It explores the setting, the characters, the event, and the movements of the characters and their relationship to each other as shown in the text. The rhetorical criticism¹² aims to explore how the language of the text reveals and shows the story told and shown in the text.¹³ The narrative-rhetorical criticism is part of literary criticism. It considers as well the world

⁹ Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach," In *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, On Interpretation: I (Winter, 1972): 279.

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donal G. Marshall (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

¹¹ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 239. See also, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, eds. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 23-49..

¹² George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 3-4. See also: Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

¹³ Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

behind the text – the world of the author. Thus, the narrative-rhetorical criticism's exploration of the story told in the text and how it is told and shown reflects what happened in the world behind the text. In this way, the narrative-rhetorical criticism considers important the world behind the text or the world of the text.

1.5 Conclusion

This Chapter firstly describes the traditional Samoan beliefs in the spirits of the dead. Family and village stories of *aitu* and how Samoan traditional healers dealt with people possessed by *aitu* are told. Part of the Samoan people's viewing their world is their dealing with the spirits of the dead as a way of life where the spirits of the dead are considered part of their life. Thus, despite the negative negation of the Samoan people traditional belief in *aitu* influenced by the Christian belief in God, the Samoans continue to consider some of their *aitu* as a vital aspect of their lives. Secondly, this Chapter deals with the reader response approach as the method of interpretation to be used to explore the text, (Mark 5: 6-13) how the Samoan people's dealing with the spirits of the dead help make more sense Jesus' exorcism of demons in the Gospel of Mark.

Chapter 2

Marks Gospel's Historical Background and the Placement Of

Mark 5:1-20

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will be divided into two sections. Section One will give a brief historical background of the Gospel of Mark. This brief background will set the platform for the exegesis to be based upon. Section Two will state the placement of Mark 5:6-13 in the progression of Mark's telling and showing of Jesus ministry. The importance of the placement of this passage would reveal an important function of Jesus' encountering of demons in his ministry to his proclamation of God's kingdom as he is on his way to Jerusalem. The following exegesis in Chapter Three will elaborate on that function.

2.2 Brief Historical Background of the Gospel of Mark

Even though the Gospel of Mark is anonymous, early tradition is unanimous that the author of this Gospel was John Mark, a close associate of Peter (see 1 Peter 5:13) and a companion of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.¹ The early witness to Markan authorship stems from Papias, bishop of the church at Hierapolis (about AD 135-140), a witness that is preserved in Eusebius's 'Ecclesiastical History'. Papias describes Mark as "the interpreter of Peter."² Although the early church was careful to maintain direct apostolic authorship for the Gospels, the church fathers consistently attributed this Gospel to Mark, who was not an apostle. This fact furnishes

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 20.

² Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 123.

indirect confirmation of Mark's authorship. The church fathers state that the Gospel of Mark was written after Peter's death, which occurred during the persecutions by the Emperor Nero in about AD 67.³ The Gospel itself, particularly chapter 13, indicates that it was written before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. The bulk of the evidence supports a date between AD 65 and 70.

In AD 64 Nero accused the Christian community of setting the city of Rome on fire, and there upon instigated a fearful persecution in which Paul and Peter perished. In the milieu of a persecuted church, living constantly under the threat of death, the evangelist Mark writes his "good news." Clearly he wants his readers to draw encouragement and strength from the life and example of Jesus. What was true for Jesus was to be true for the apostles and disciples of all ages.

At the heart of the Gospel is the explicit pronouncement "*...that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again*" (8:31). This pronouncement of suffering and death not only is repeated (9:31; 10:32-34), but becomes the norm for committed discipleship: "*...If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*" (8:34). These words of Jesus lead to the following words of Jesus considered the key verse of the Gospel of Mark for it reveals the messianic secret of who Jesus is in Mark's Gospel – Jesus the Messiah the Suffering Servant: "*For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve*" (10:45). Mark leads his readers to the Cross of Jesus, where they can discover meaning and hope in their suffering.

³ Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 514; William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The International Commentary of the New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 23.

Mark structures his Gospel around various geographical movements of Jesus which are climaxed by his death and subsequent Resurrection. After the introduction (1:1-13), Mark narrates the public ministry of Jesus in Galilee (1:14-9:50) and Judea (chapters 10-13), culminating in the Passion and Resurrection (chapters 14-16). The Gospel may be viewed as two halves joined together by the hinge of Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah (8:27-30) and Jesus' first announcement of His crucifixion (8:31).

Mark is the shortest of the Gospels, containing no genealogy and no account of the birth and early Judean ministry of Jesus. It is the Gospel of action, moving rapidly from one scene to another. John's Gospel is a studied portrait of the Lord; Matthew and Luke present what might be described as a series of colored slides, while Mark's gospel is like a motion picture of the life of Jesus. Mark accents the activity he records by the use of the Greek word *eutheos*, usually translated "immediately." The word occurs forty-two times in Mark, more than in all the rest of the New Testament. Mark's frequent use of the Greek imperfect tense, denoting continuous action, also moves the narrative at a rapid pace. Mark is also the Gospel of vividness. Graphic, striking phrases occur frequently to allow the reader to form a mental picture of the scene described. The looks and gestures of Jesus receive unusual attention. Mark places little emphasis on Jewish law and customs, always interpreting them for the reader when he does mention them. This feature tends to support the tradition that Mark wrote for a Gentile, Roman audience.

In many ways, Mark emphasizes the Passion of Jesus so that it becomes the gauge by which the whole of Jesus' ministry and the ministry of His disciples may be measured: "*For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve* (10:45). Jesus' entire ministry (miracles, table fellowship with sinners, choice of disciples, teaching on

the kingdom of God, etc) is set within the context of the self-giving love of the Son of God, climaxed in the Cross and Resurrection. Mark's Gospel teaches that the life of discipleship means following Jesus along the same path of misunderstanding and rejection that he encountered. For followers of Jesus in all ages the warning and promise are sure: *"...If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."* (8:34-35). Mark underscores the need for faith in the person, message, and power of Jesus to help those in need (see 1:15; 2:5; 4:40; 5:34, 36; 6:6; 9:19; 11:22-24). The opposite of such faith can be seen in the motif of hard hearts (see 3:5; 7:14-23; 8:17). The incarnate Christ that Mark describes is one who is willing and able to help those in extreme need. Finally, Mark's Gospel assures Christian workers of all generations that the same attesting miracles that accredited the ministries of the apostles will continue as characteristic features of God's people under the New Covenant (16:17-18).

2.3 Placement of Mark 5:1-20

To identify the placement of Mark 5:1-20 in the progression of Mark's presentation of Jesus' ministry is important for it will help identify the function of Jesus' dealing with demons (*aitu temoni*) in Mark's gospel. It will also help identify the setting of the event told and shown in Mark 5:1-10 which is Jesus healing the Gerasene Demoniac.

There are various structures of Mark's gospel but I have chosen to use in this study C. Clifton Black's proposed structure⁴ of Mark's telling and showing of the

⁴ C Clifton Black, *Mark* (New Interpreter's Bible One Volume Commentary; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 965.

ministry of Jesus, shown below. One of the reasons why I have chosen this structure is its geographical emphasis.

I. Prologue: Introducing Jesus (1:1–15)

II. The Early Days (1:16–10:52)

III. The Final Days (11:1–15:47)

IV. Epilogue: The Resurrection (16:1–20)]

The beginning of Black's structure as prologue (1:1-15) introduces who is Jesus. I regard this prologue as also the beginning of Mark's presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Followed the prologue is the second part considered as the early days of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and Judea. Part three as the next part of the structure is regarded as the final days of Jesus' ministry or Jesus' final time in Jerusalem. The final days are told and shown in the passion narrative which ends with the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection referred to by Black as the epilogue.

As mentioned, Black's structure's geographical emphasis is considered important in the exploration of the placement of the text, Mark 5:1-20. The selected text will be referred to in the exegesis a rhetorical and narrative unit. Black's structure places the event of Jesus' healing of the Gerasene Demoniac in the early days of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and Judea (10:1) before entering Jerusalem (11:1). Jesus' teachings and healing activities in the early days of Jesus' ministry in Mark's Gospel show Jesus' authority as the Son of God.⁵ Healings and exorcism showing Jesus' authority reveals Jesus' dealing with demons a very important part of Jesus' ministry. That importance is shown in Mark beginning his presentation of Jesus' ministry with "a collection of healings and

⁵ Achtemeier, Green and Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament*, 125.

exorcism” (1:21-28, 29-31, 32-39, 40-45).⁶ According to the flow of Mark’s presentation of Jesus ministry, it is after Jesus delivering six parables about the Kingdom of God in Chapter 4 then gives his disciples a command to go over to the other side of the sea by boat. Crossing the sea they face a storm stilled by Jesus. Following this event they reach the other side of the river to the country of the Gerasenes. Crossing the river is important for it shows that Jesus’ ministry in the early days is restless ministry. This is shown in the time of the day they left for the other side of the sea which is ‘evening (4:35). So Jesus’ encountering the Gerasene Demoniac when Jesus arrives at the other side of the sea is important. It shows that there seems to be another world on the other side of the sea – a world that is difficult to enter – the world of demons. The importance of this world on the other side of the sea is reflected in the event that happens after healing the demoniac. In 5:21, the narrator says that Jesus returned to where he came from by boat. It shows that Jesus went especially to other side of the sea for a particular mission – healing those possessed by demons. Finding out why that mission is important in the early days of Jesus’ ministry and how it is carried out will be the task of the following exegesis in Chapter Three.

2.4 Conclusion

This Chapter provides a brief historical background of the Gospel of Mark followed by an explanation of the placement of the selected text in the progression of Jesus’ ministry according to Mark. The brief historical background gives background knowledge of Mark’s Gospel showing Jesus healing and exorcism very important parts of Jesus’ ministry as presented by Mark. This background is important and will be used

⁶ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 174.

when the analysis of the exegesis of the selected text in Chapter Three from the traditional Samoan belief of *aitu* is made.

Chapter 3

Exegesis of Mark 5:1-20

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter will give an exegesis of the Mark 5:1-20 using the narrative-rhetorical criticism followed my response to the interpretation from the Samoan world view of *aitu* as described in Chapter One in the Final Chapter – the Conclusion. The questions that will guide the exegesis are: Are there various and different types of spirits of the dead? If there are, which are the spirits Jesus dealt with in his ministry?

3.2 Exegesis

3.2.1 Jesus' teaching in Mark 4:1-41 foreshadows the healing of the Gerasene Demoniac

Mentioned in Chapter Two is the placement of Mark 5:1-20 in the progression of Mark's presentation of Jesus' ministry. It is placed in the section considered as the early days of Jesus ministry in Galilee (1:16-10:52).¹ This part of Mark's Gospel anticipates the final days of Jesus ministry as told in 11:1-15:47 before the resurrection story in 16:1-20. Focusing on Mark 5:1-20, this Chapter aims to explore this passage as a rhetorical and narrative unit (that has a beginning, middle, and an ending) to find out if there is a function of the demons character in Jesus' ministry. If there is, how does that function help explain the Samoan worldview of *aitu*?

Before moving onto the exploration of the selected text, it is important to look again at Jesus' authority as Son of God to carry out the work he does as told and shown

¹ Black, *Mark*, 965.

by Mark. Jesus' teachings and healing activities in the early days of Jesus' ministry in Mark's Gospel show Jesus' authority as the Son of God.² Healings and exorcism showing Jesus' authority reveals Jesus' dealing with demons a very important part of Jesus' ministry. That importance is shown in Mark beginning his presentation of Jesus' ministry with "a collection of healings and exorcism" (1:21-28, 29-31, 32-39, 40-45).³

According to the flow of Mark's presentation of Jesus ministry, Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene demoniac is after Jesus delivering six parables about the Kingdom of God in Chapter 4 then gives his disciples a command to go over to the other side of the sea by boat. Jesus' actions and teachings in Chapter 4 are considered in this interpretation as events that foreshadow what is going to happen in Chapter 5. Chapter 4 begins with Jesus teaching the crowd with the parable of the sower. Only the people working in the farm understood sowing, so the crowd that gathered around Jesus near the sea could be seen as the crowd of farmers.⁴ They are met by Jesus speaking about a sower wasting the seeds sowing on the not good grounds for the seeds to grow. However, the sower ends up sowing the seed on the good soil after all. This parable therefore could implicitly teach the crowd about good common sense, of what to do in order to be a good farmer. It is not to waste time on doing what they know they should not do.

Instead, use time effectively by doing exactly what is expected of a good farmer. The expectations are making wise decisions and showing they are good listeners. They know what to do however their other personal desires hold them back from doing so. They know that a tree that grows on good soil bears good fruit. The farmers know that

² Achtemeier, Green and Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament*, 125.

³ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 174.

⁴ Robert Foster, "Paper on Mark 4:1-20," *Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Virtual Meeting* held 25th June 2021.

when they go home at night they do not put the lamp under the bushel basket or the bed. But rather, the lamp should be on the lampstand to check their bodies, their tools, and prepare them for the next day's work. The farmers would have the knowledge of the type of seed called mustard seed. When a farmer puts it on the palm of his hand, he knows that it is a tiny seed but grows from it a big tree. All this knowledge and experience of farming to sustain a high quality of farming life, demonstrates the skills required in the Kingdom of God. But this is the problem for those following Jesus especially his disciples. They have been following Jesus but still do not acquire essential required listening skills.

At the end of Chapter 4, Mark speaks about Jesus' crossing the sea with his disciples. What happens contrasts the not listening of the disciples. The wind and the sea listen to Jesus. This is followed by the demons listening to Jesus in Chapter 5. Thus, the event in 5:1-20 could be looked at as showing the demons becomingness to be good spirits when they accept the being-ness of God. This interpretation will be elaborated upon in the following exegesis.

3.2.2 Mark 5:1-20 as a rhetorical and narrative unit⁵

Beginning: vv1-5 (The Gerasene Demoniac shows his strength)

Middle: vv6-13 (Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene Demoniac)

End: vv14-20 (Gerasene Demoniac as a disciple)

The rhetorical unit is attributed to Jesus. The narrator, in the beginning of the unit establishes, Jesus as the main character who will be carrying out the healing of the

⁵ A rhetorical unit is a narrative or story in a progressive texture which has its own rhetorical world – beginning, middle, and ending. George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33-34.

Gerasene Demoniac. Combining the above-mentioned parts form the rhetorical unit called the “Jesus’ Healing of the Gerasene Demoniac.”

3.2.3 Progression of the Unit from the Beginning to End

The beginning and ending of this healing event (5:1-20) is an *inclusio*.⁶ The beginning (vv1-5) shows the two main characters in this healing event. They are Jesus and the demoniac. The demoniac is shown meeting Jesus. The ending speaks of these two characters again and at this time, the demoniac is healed by Jesus and is told to return to his family. Thus, what is happening in-between this *inclusio* is Jesus’ healing of the demoniac showing that a bad spirit as a demon can become a good spirit.

There is progression shown in the three parts of the unit. The beginning indicates the demoniac meeting Jesus. Why he approaches Jesus is not explicitly mentioned in this part of the unit. However, Jesus as the Son of God as portrayed from the beginning of Mark’s Gospel to this point of Jesus’ ministry, reveals the reason why the demoniac wants to meet Jesus. Important in the beginning of the unit is the detailed description of the great strength possessed by the demoniac which emphasizes the story’s purpose that Jesus has the power to cast out even the strongest of demons.⁷ The middle part of the unit reveals why the demoniac immediately approaches Jesus when Jesus gets out of the boat. The demoniac, approaches Jesus, cries out in a loud voice, “What have you to do with me?” (Mark 5:7), literally “what of me and you?” “What of me and you” is a common Semitic idiom used to recognize distance between the speaker and addressee

⁶ *Inclusio* is a rhetorical device of signs of opening and closure of a rhetorical unit. See Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 34, 82.

⁷ P. G. Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death: Persuading Mark’s early Readers* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 143.

found in other biblical passages (cf. 2 Sam 19:22 and Kings 17:18).⁸ Every time this idiom is used in the gospels it is in recognition of the divine nature of Jesus and his adversarial relationship to the demoniacs.⁹ The demoniac knows that Jesus has greater power therefore the demoniac wants to stop Jesus from tormenting him. In other words, there is sense of consciousness in the person possessed by demons that despite the power of demons possessing him there is hope to spare his life. How that sense of consciousness came about could be looked at as evident in the demoniac asking Jesus to send them to the swine. The end part of the unit reveals the result of the healing event. The person possessed by demons has put on clothes and is in his right mind. More importantly in the end part is Jesus sending of this man to go back to his family. The following interpretation will elaborate on the claims made in the above explanation of the progression of the unit.

3.2.4 Elaboration on the Progression of the Unit¹⁰

The beginning of the unit (vv 1-5) speaks of the setting where the event of healing the Gerasene demoniac takes place. It is a place of tombs called Gerasene. As such, the spirits therefore that possessed this man are the spirits of the dead called the demons. The spirits of the dead as demons are considered in the 1st century Mediterranean world as the evil spirits. There is debate on who are the Gerasene people, and why did Jesus go to them by willingly crossing the sea to get there. The interpretation by Roskam

⁸ C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 281-288.

⁹ W. D. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: In Three Volumes* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 87.

¹⁰ Any text has a narrational and progressive texture and pattern. Robbins writes: "Progressive texture resides in sequences (progressions) of words and phrases throughout the unit." See Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 9.

makes sense.¹¹ Roskam says that the Gerasene place is situated on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. At the time of Jesus' ministry as told by Mark, this place was a Hellenistic place not Israel. It is why a herd of swine was kept nearby this place otherwise it is forbidden according to the Law of Moses. Whatever the location of the story, Jesus' crossing over into Gentile territory is symbolic of Jesus' movement from the mostly Jewish to Gentile world.¹² As Sean Freyne argues that,

“Crossing boundaries, be they social, political or religious, is usually also making a statement, especially if the boundaries are crossed freely. Because of the territorial nature of the Jewish religion which viewed Eretz (land of Israel) Israel as Yahweh's gift, there was a particular need to pay attention to the precise boundaries of the land, as defined by the religious establishments.”¹³

This claim makes Jesus' crossing the sea to go to Gerasene according to Mark as Jesus' taking the message of God's salvation to the gentiles. The strength of the demoniac is described as strength that no human being can handle even the chains. Simply, this person has supernatural strength. His behavior is also another problem. He is out of control by making noises day and night. The most worrying and scaring part of his problem is self-harm by bruising himself with stones. These are actions of a person possessed with demons. I have witnessed this type of behavior in Samoa. I have seen five people trying to hold down a person possessed with an *aitu*. Sometimes, the possessed person does self-harm by hitting himself/herself. The literary significance of the author's telling and showing how great is the strength of this demoniac in the beginning anticipates the sovereignty of God in and through Jesus Christ that will help resolve the problem. The problem is both an individual and community problem.

¹¹ H. N. Roskam, *Gospel of Mark in its Historical and Social Context* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 100.

¹² S. E. La Verdiere, *Luke* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1986), 116.

¹³ S. Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel: Collected Essays* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 164.

Then comes the next part of the story where Jesus now acts to heal the man possessed by the spirits of the dead which do evil ways as the demons or the unclean spirits. Jesus casts away the unclean spirit named Legion. Legion is an Aramaic word for a soldier and Greek word for a military group of five thousand men.¹⁴ This name would bring the Roman presence to mind. A legion was a division within the Roman army of 6,000 infantry with auxiliary troops. In the province of Syria, Palestine held four legions at the time of Jesus.¹⁵ That Jesus conquers the “Legion” could suggest to an audience that perhaps Jesus was powerful enough to conquer the Romans presence. The evangelists, with the use of this one word, imply Jesus was the Hebrew Messiah.

The spiritually unclean man is paired with the physically unclean swine. Pigs were a symbol of paganism. Swine were linked with idol worship, as they were a sacrificial animal used in the Greek cults of Zeus, Dionysus, and Athena.¹⁶ The symbol for the Roman legion was a wild boar.¹⁷ Therefore, the evangelists could have chosen pigs to point out that Jesus would be capable of defeating a Roman presence by driving out a legion of Roman swine.

The demons come out of the man and enter the swine, which rush down the cliff into the sea and drown. Sending demons into animate objects when exorcising them from humans is well-attested Hellenistic demonology.¹⁸ That the herd goes berserk is part of the physical evidence that the exorcism worked.¹⁹ The results of the exorcism are immediately visible when the pigs rush down the bank. R. A. Horsley suggests that

¹⁴ D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (Baltimore: Penguin Book, 1963), 149-155.

¹⁵ G. B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 121.

¹⁶ R. E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 156.

¹⁷ J. F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 181.

¹⁸ H. Hendrickx, *The Third Gospel for the Third World* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier Book, 1998), 179.

¹⁹ R. C. Tannehill, *Luke, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 158

the swine drowning in the sea would have evoked memories of the Exodus of Israel when the Pharaoh's armies pursuing the fleeing Israelites had been cast into the sea and drowned (Exodus 15:1-10).²⁰

Interestingly, the demoniac is asking not to send them out of the country meaning they still want to be given another chance to live again on the place they called home. Sending them out of the country is like sending them out of their place of belonging a place they called home. Where the tombs are is their place of belonging that connects them to their families and their land. The problem here is the reflective of culture and values pertained to a place or group of people. It is obvious that swine is unclean according to the Law of Moses. So Jesus drowning of the unclean spirit could be also interpreted as drowning of cultural ways and values that are considered unclean, making the people of a particular place keep their own good ways. This includes the Jewish particularism belief of God as God of the Jewish people only. In other words, the drowning of the swine could be also looked at as Jesus drowning of the Jewish laws that are separating them from others or laws that are stopping the gentiles from becoming part God's salvation. This happens in our Samoan society where our ancestors tell us through their spirits what we need to do in order to maintain our cultures, our values, and our beliefs in ways that we can continue on living life that they believe will bring us blessings abundantly.

This interpretation is reflected in the end part of the unit. The demoniac is now healed and witnessed by the people from the city and the country – the people from the place the unclean spirit did not want to be sent to. They want Jesus to leave their neighborhood. The people from the country could be interpreted as those who are not

²⁰ R. A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001,) 141.

happy with what is happening to their herds. However, Jesus' reply to the healed demoniac shows the whole purpose of Jesus' healing of this man. The healed man asks to go with Jesus but Jesus says: "*Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.*" The verb "go" as "*Ἔπαγε*" is an imperative that is usually used by Jesus when commissioning his disciples to go and proclaim the good news. It is the similar verb used in Jesus commissioning of the twelve disciples in Matthew 28:19-20. Thus, Jesus' sending of the healed demoniac to return to his family and friends is interpreted as Jesus' commissioning of this man to be a disciple of Jesus to his own family, community, and friends. The story ends by showing that this man does the work he is sent by Jesus to do by beginning proclaiming what Jesus has done for him.

More importantly, to relate this exploration of 5:1-20 to the progression of Jesus' ministry that emphasizes the importance of listening as shown in the parables in Chapter 4, the whole purpose of Jesus' healing of the Gerasene demoniac is to show that even those possessed with demons listen to God. Their listening to God could make them disciples of Jesus. If the winds and the sea listen, and now those possessed with demons or evil spirits listen, why not humankind. Who are them as people created by God not to listen? Everything else God creates listens except humankind.

3.3 Conclusion

The exegesis has shown that the whole purpose of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac is to show two things. First, Jesus as the Son of God has authority over all that God created and creates. Second, all so-called spirits such as the spirits of the dead either good or bad knows that Jesus is God and can listen and become a disciple of Jesus. Thus, there are *aitu* considered as good *aitu* and not good *aitu* considered as demons or *temoni*.

Conclusion

My response to the Exegesis from my Samoan Worldview of

Aitu

After all, Jesus' casting out of the demons in his ministry in this story (5:1-20) is a healing ministry. Is this not seen in the Samoan traditional healers' dealing with the sick possessed with the spirits of the dead? Our Samoan stories and life experiences of encountering *aitu* or spirits of the dead will be used as a worldview to analyse my interpretation of Jesus' exorcism of demoniac spirits. The result of this analysis would bring about a realisation of whether there are functions of the spirits of the dead in our Samoan social and cultural worlds.

From this above exploration of Jesus' healing of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5:1-20, interesting results came out which help me believe that *aitu* as spirits of our ancestors and family members could be looked as not at all bad spirits or not all of them are bad spirits – spirits considered as demons. The way the Gerasene demoniac approached Jesus not to torment him is like an approach of a person seeking another chance in life or to normal living. It is evident in his kneeling down begging Jesus – an action of remorse or repentance. In this action itself, the demoniac has shown that within his self are two types of spirits – the good spirit and the bad spirit. It is the good spirit that makes him acknowledge Jesus as the Son of the Most High God. The importance of knowing that after all there is power and might greater than any strength or power a person possesses is shown in this encounter between Jesus as Son of God and the Gerasene demoniac. It is this might of God that heals anyone possessed by the bad spirits of the dead or the demons.

In reflection about the spirit of our ancestors and our family members, even though it is not explicitly mentioned that there is such thing as the good spirit of the dead in Jesus' ministry, what is manifestly shown is that there is not good spirit of the dead considered as demons. If there is not good spirit, then I can say there is also good spirit of the dead. It is the good spirit of the dead that led the demoniac to Jesus to be healed and also let Jesus cast out ways and values that become barriers to other people becoming part of God's salvation.

So, to conclude this work, I can say that there are spirits and ghosts that co-exist with humans on earth. This can be compared to when Jews and Greek world at times of early church history when they put together books and canonized the Bible. With my sense of culture and belief in the Scriptures, I firmly attest there are three worlds that are closely inter twined as we navigate this life. These are humans, spirits, and the higher power of God.

Overall, God's power through Jesus Christ defeated all demons and evil spirits scales. This is the only way of how this kind of illness on earth must be healed and cut off from the lives of people.

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