



Reading the Bible with
Green Eyes

A workshop with Kendra Haloviak Valentine



Ecocriticism

- An approach to reading literature that intentionally highlights the physical and natural worlds as they are represented in the work.
 - In the text, how is nature represented?
 - In the text, what value is placed on nature, land, creation?
 - In the text, what is the relationship between nature and its treatment by humans?



"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."

—Genesis 1:31

The Green Bible



Mixed sources
Product group from well-managed
forests, controlled sources and
recycled wood or fiber.



NRSV

New Revised Standard Version



HarperOne

An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

PSALMS 94:16—96:8

580

- 16 Who rises up for me against the wicked?
Who stands up for me against
evildoers?
- 17 If the LORD had not been my help,
my soul would soon have lived in the
land of silence.
- 18 When I thought, "My foot is slipping,"
your steadfast love, O LORD, held me
up.
- 19 When the cares of my heart are many,
your consolations cheer my soul.
- 20 Can wicked rulers be allied with you,
those who contrive mischief by
statute?
- 21 They band together against the life of
the righteous,
and condemn the innocent to death.
- 22 But the LORD has become my
stronghold,
and my God the rock of my refuge.
- 23 He will repay them for their iniquity
and wipe them out for their
wickedness;
the LORD our God will wipe them
out.

Psalm 95

A Call to Worship and Obedience

- 1 O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock
of our salvation!
- 2 Let us come into his presence with
thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with
songs of praise!
- 3 For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his
also.
- 5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands
have formed.
- 6 O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our
Maker!

Psalm 96

Praise to God Who Comes in Judgment

- 1 O sing to the LORD a new song,
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day,
his marvelous works among all the
peoples.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations,
for great is the LORD, and greatly to be
praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.
- 4 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
- 5 Honor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his
sanctuary.
- 6 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the
peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and
strength.
- 7 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his
name;
bring an offering, and come into his
courts.

581

PSALMS 96:9—98:6

- 9 Worship the LORD in holy splendor,
tremble before him, all the earth.
- 10 Say among the nations, "The LORD is
king!"
The world is firmly established; it
shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with
equity.
- 11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the
earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing
for joy
before the LORD; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with
righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

Psalm 98

Praise the Judge of the World

A Psalm.

Psalm 97

The Glory of God's Reign

- 1 The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!
- 2 Clouds and thick darkness are all around
him;
righteousness and justice are the
foundation of his throne.
- 3 Fire goes before him,
and consumes his adversaries on
every side.
- 4 His lightnings light up the world;
the earth sees and trembles.
- 5 The mountains melt like wax before the
LORD;
before the Lord of all the earth.
- 6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness;
and all the peoples behold his glory.
- 7 All worshippers of images are put to
shame,
those who make their boast in
worthless idols;
all gods bow down before him.

^a Heb daughters

^b Cm: Heb You who love the LORD hate

^c Gk Syr Jerome: Heb is now

Looking at the gospel of Mark with an ecocritical lens...



Some questions...

- Why does Jesus destroy 2,000 pigs?
- Why do the demons want to remain in the land?
- Why does Jesus negotiate with the demons?
- Why do the demons seem to commit suicide?
- Why do the locals become deeply afraid?

“the story of the deliverance of a man becomes the story of the deliverance of a land”

– Robert A. Guelich

Mark 5:1-20

¹They came to the other side of the sea to the land of the Gerasenes. ²When he [Jesus] had come out of the boat immediately out of the tombs there met him a man with an unclean spirit ³who lived in the tombs and no one and nothing could any longer bind him, not even with a chain; ⁴for often he had been bound with shackles and with chains but he had been able to wrench apart the chains and he had crushed the shackles and no one was strong enough to restrain him. ⁵Through every night and day in the tombs and in the mountains he was crying out and cutting himself with stones.

Mark 5:1-20

⁶When he saw Jesus from afar he ran and fell down to worship him. ⁷Crying out with a loud voice he said: “What have you to do with me, Jesus son of God the most high? I adjure you by God, do not torture me.” ⁸For he was saying to him: “Unclean spirit, come out of the man.” ⁹He asked him, “What is your name?” And he said to him, “Legion is my name, for we are many.” ¹⁰He repeatedly begged him that he not send them out of the land.

Mark 5:1-20

¹¹Now there was on the mountain a large herd of pigs feeding.

¹²They begged him saying: “Send us into the pigs so that we might enter them.” ¹³And he dismissed them. And going out the unclean spirits entered into the pigs and the herd, about 2,000, charged down the steep bank into the sea, and drowned in the sea.

Mark 5:1-20

¹⁴The ones who grazed them fled and reported in the city and in the country. And they came to see what had happened. ¹⁵And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man sitting clothed and in a right mind, the one who had had the legion, and they were afraid. ¹⁶The ones who had seen described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and concerning the pigs. ¹⁷And they began to beg him to go away from their domain.

Mark 5:1-20

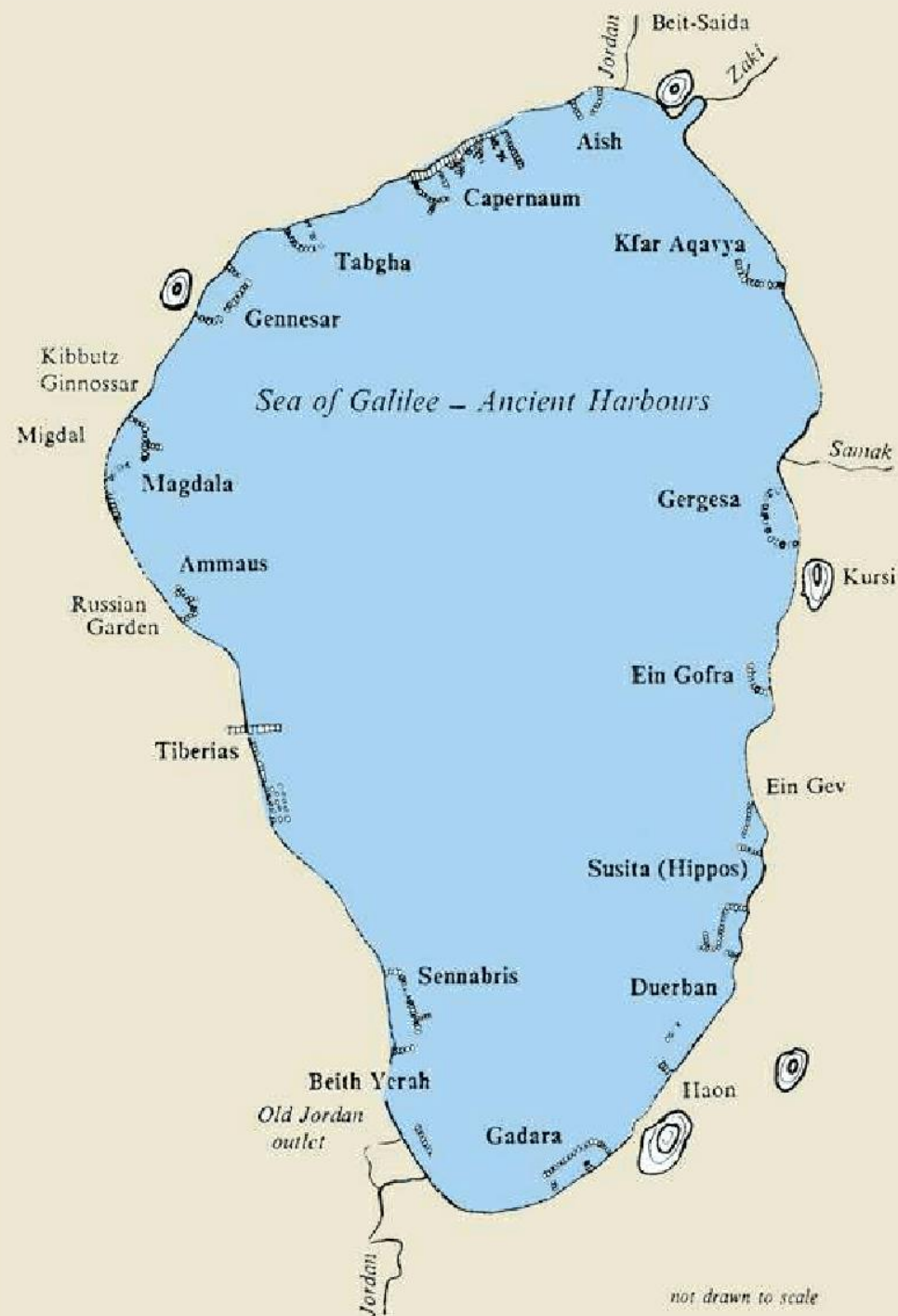
¹⁸And as he was getting into the boat, the demon-possessed man begged him that he might be with him.

¹⁹He did not allow him, but said to him, “Go away to your home to your people and report to them all that the Lord has done, how he has shown mercy to you.”

²⁰And he departed and began to proclaim in the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him and everyone marveled.



The Sea of Galilee



not drawn to scale

For locals, land (*chora*) = countryside
around cities of the Decapolis for farming

For Jews, land (*chora*) = outside the land of
Israel = unclean

“other side” = Jewish side is normative



The Sea of Galilee



First century tomb

William
Brassey
Hole





Mark J Musser



Allocation economies –

- Kinship communities (75-150 people)
- Subsistence agriculture – all worked the land
- Surplus avoided
- Nomadic
- Avoidance of grazing animals requiring large pasturage and water supplies with no benefit beyond meat
- Sheep and goats produced meat, milk and fiber and required less water

Extraction economies –

- To supply non-laborers (priests, elite)
- Large surplus compulsory



*Any pig husbandry would be shocking,
especially 2,000 grazing pigs...*

Ecologically unsustainable



That many pigs using that much land and water would be ecologically unsustainable...

What might be the reason for this situation??

Roman occupation of this region...



- Gadara (Decapolis) – Roman army ordered all youth killed
- Roman general kills thousands by drowning them in the Jordan River
- Josephus: “Jordan could not be passed over, by reason of the dead bodies that were in it.”
- Gerasa (Decapolis) – killed 1,000 young men
- Josephus: War had gone through “all the mountainous country, and all the plain country also.”

“Legion is my name, for we are many” (Mark 5:9)

“legion”: a division of soldiers





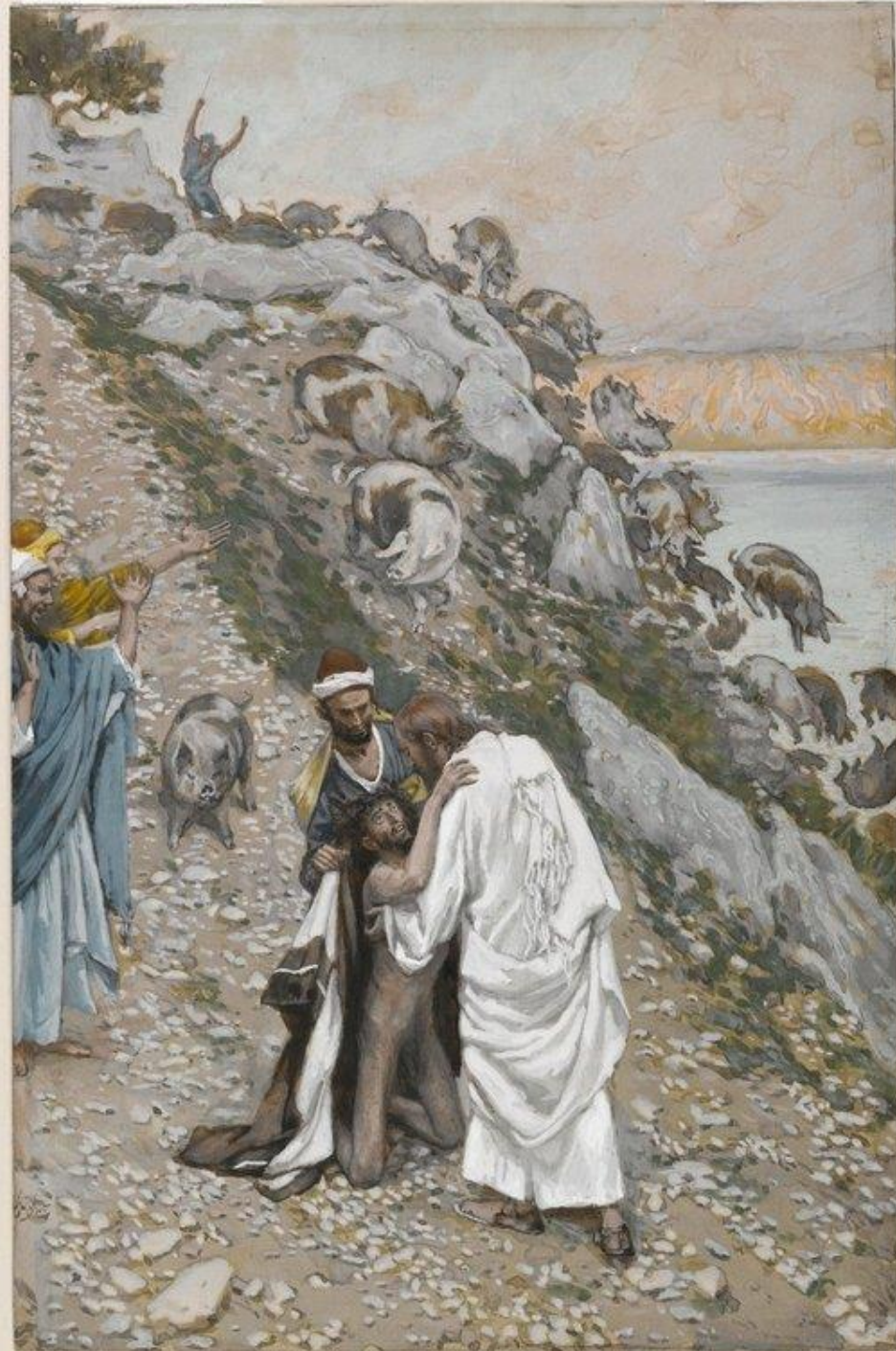
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Taken from an article by
Robert Wimer



Deliverance of a man → deliverance of a land

Unclean man (Legion) → unclean land (Gentile)

Focus on the spiritual healing...

If land is ecologically unsustainable, with people's existence at risk due to colonial oppression (for Mark, "demonic")

Then...

Deliverance of a man (Legion) → deliverance of a land

Because of Jesus' encounter with Legion, countless men, women and children will live!

ECOTHEOLOGY
AND NONHUMAN
ETHICS IN SOCIETY



A COMMUNITY OF COMPASSION



Edited by Melissa J. Brotton

“Liberating Legion: An Ecocritical,
Postcolonial reading of Mark 5:1-20”
By Kendra Haloviak Valentine

What might a focus on the natural environment help us see as we read Scripture?

Mark's gospel...

- Lots of wilderness scenes (chap 1) – “come to a desolate place and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31)
- Water as vital resource (1:4-8)
- Satan tempting Jesus – wild animals (1:12-13)
- Sea of Galilee as location – “beside the sea” (2:13)
- Grainfields (2:23)
- Outside vs. inside a house (3:31)
- Sower and other agrarian parables (chapter 4)
- Three sea crossings in Mark (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:13-21)
- Feeding miracles (6, 8)
- Triumphal entry descriptions (11)
- Fig tree (11, 13)
- Gethsemane (14:32-42)

Of course... the gospel of John's
creation imagery...

The problematic Mark 7:24-30...

Discussion...

Mark 7:24-30

But from there he [Jesus] arose and went away to the border of Tyre (and Sidon). And he entered into a house. He had wanted no one to know, yet he could not escape notice. But immediately a woman heard about him, whose little daughter had an unclean spirit. She came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Greek, Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. And he said to her: “First let the children be satisfied, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” But she answered and said to him: “Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” And he said to her: “For these words you may go, the demon has left your daughter.” And she went to her home and found the child lying on the bed and the demon had gone out. Then he returned again from the border of Tyre...



Illuminated
Manuscript – *Book of
Hours*, by the
Limbourg brothers
(1412-1416)



Juan de Flandes,
“Christ and the
Canaanite Woman”
(1500)

Hans Leander –

Jesus doesn't have a problem with Gentiles or women earlier in the story... what is going on here? She is a Greek from Tyre = an affluent, cultured city dweller (with social and economic power)

Her wit and wisdom: dogs are already eating!

Sharon Ringe –

- Jesus came for the poor and marginalized
- Nicaraguan peasants: “she must have been an oppressor”
- Woman accepts Jesus’ assessment/insult – after all, shouldn’t expect discipleship to be easy (8:34-38)
- She will take the crumbs typically left for the poor
- As a woman who is white—awareness (oppressor)

Reading Scripture with Green Eyes...

