ReMARKable: Across the Sea and Back (Ch. 5) Scripture Reading: Mark 5

Feb. 9th, 2025 Memory Verse: Mark 5:36b

**[SLIDE 1]**

Mark’s last chapter took a bit of a break from the relentless action long enough to share with us some parables from Jesus. But after a bit of teaching, Mark throws us back into the fray as Jesus and his disciples contend with a raging storm as they cross the Sea of Galilee. **[SLIDE 2]** I should say, the disciples contended with this storm because Jesus was sleeping. But once they wake him, he asserts his dominance even over nature itself, as with a word, he calms the storm.

Still in awe at such an outcome, their boat makes it to the southeastern shore of the lake, a place Mark calls Gerasa. **[SLIDE 3]** This, Mark’s readers would know, is Gentile territory. It’s not a proper place for a proper Jew because the people you meet and the things you touch are all going to be unclean. This, in turn, would make you unclean as well. This tension involving uncleanness is heightened as Jesus and his crew head inland and a man approaches them from out of the cemetery, a place that defines uncleanness. **[SLIDE 4]** We come to find that this man is possessed by many demons, also called unclean spirits, Legions of them. He is not in control of himself. He has superhuman strength and cannot be bound. He lives among the tombs and cuts himself. However we might describe this man, the term disorder seems to cover all the symptoms. Everything about his life, his behavior, his mental state…it is chaotic, unhinged…disordered. Unclean and disordered. We have just seen Jesus bring order and calm to a chaotic sea. He spoke authoritative words. It harkens back to creation itself when God brought structure and order to the void. **[SLIDE 5]** Genesis 1:2 tells us that, before his first act of creation, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. For the Jewish mindset, water or the sea, represented chaos. And out of that chaos God speaks order. Creation is good because it is ordered, it is bounded. The sea is bounded by the land. The sky is separated from the waters. The night and day each have their place. Families and marriage are good because they introduce boundaries into the mess of humanity. A man is bound to his wife, separated from other women. It is the work of the devil to bring disorder, to break down the goodness, the boundedness, the order of God’s creation. The disciples had just experienced that chaos in a very literal way on the lake and now they face a very similar sort of disorder within the frame of this rather horrifying man.

Yet it is not the man who is shocking, but rather the state he is in. **[SLIDE 6]** According to the text, this man has been victimized. He is a tragic character. Verse 7 reveals what we might have already guessed. These demons know full well who Jesus is. Jesus, for his part, learns that many demons are at work here bringing a teeming chaos, a whirling windstorm into this man’s life. In verse 10, the demons beg Jesus not to send them out of the area, an unclean area remember. They come up with the brilliant idea that maybe they could go into the pigs **[SLIDE 7]** on the hillside instead of having to wander the earth as disembodied spirits. Pigs of course, are another layer of uncleanness introduced into the story. Jesus grants permission. **[SLIDE 8]** From the text itself it is a little hard to discern if Jesus sent them into the pigs or if the demons sort of make their exit on their own. What is clear is that Jesus gives permission…he is calling the shots here. The unclean spirits go into the 2,000 unclean pigs, and in verse 13, the whole herd promptly runs off the bank and into the sea; into the heart of chaos where they belong.

The shepherds, having just lost their livelihood, run into town afraid and angry. They wrangle up a crowd to come out to the scene of the incident. People see the man now in his right mind, **[SLIDE 9]** they get the whole story about what had happened, and their response? Verse 17, **[SLIDE 10]** they beg Jesus to just leave them alone. They can’t understand what has happened, but Jesus seems to be bad for business. But this man who has been healed, he wants to go with Jesus, a 13th disciple! This man would surely be committed after what Jesus has done for him. But no. Jesus grants the request of a legion of demons, but he denies the request of this genuine man. **[SLIDE 11]** Jesus has other plans for him. And here, for the first time, we see a reversal of Jesus’ normal policy. We have talked a lot about the Messianic secret. **[SLIDE 12]** People, and demons, were to keep quiet about Jesus’ identity as the Messiah who is the Son of God. But here this man is commissioned to go and tell **[SLIDE 13]** what the Lord has done for him. Verse 20 let’s us know that this man did not fail on that commission. As the very first missionary to the Gentiles, he went out and preached about the saving power and divine authority of Jesus. Has Jesus brought order to your chaos? Has he brought the goodness of bounded creation to your disordered thoughts and disordered decisions and disordered desires? Well, he is not here on earth. We can no longer climb in the boat and literally follow in his footsteps, but we can do as this man did. We can go out and tell others. **[SLIDE 14]** Within the context of this story, this man is each of us. A Gentile convert who has been touched by Jesus, healed and made new. Like him, we’ve been given a story to tell! What has Jesus done for you? Tell yourself this good news each and every day. Know what your own story is so that you can share it with others. That is our call.

Jesus crosses back to the Jewish side of the lake where, what does he find awaiting him? Another large crowd! **[SLIDE 15]** But the crowd parts as a prominent leader named Jairus runs to Jesus and bows low before him. His daughter was on her deathbed. But Jairus declares that if Jesus would only come quickly, he could lay his hands on her and bring healing. He, and the crowd by the way, head to Jairus’ house. People were pushing and shoving along the streets and pressing against one another. You can imagine how slow going that would be. Jairus must have been biting his nails in agony. He got to Jesus, he told Jesus about his daughter, Jesus had agreed to come! Hallelujah! But time was of the essence and, in this mob, he was walking so slowly. You can imagine Jairus doing everything he could to clear the way and make room, but progress is so difficult when you are surrounded by disorderly chaos. Then to Jairus’ absolute horror, in verse 30, Jesus stops. **[SLIDE 16]** He actually turns around! Wrong way Jesus! My house is just down this way and to the left. My daughter Jesus! She could go at any minute! But Jesus had another daughter in mind at that very moment. **[SLIDE 16]**

Mark interrupts the story of Jairus by inserting another story about a woman who suffered from some kind of bleeding disorder. Things were not as they should be and because of her condition, this woman, like the demoniac across the lake, has been deemed unclean. She had had this status for the last twelve years. She was out of options and out of hope. But she had just a seed of faith. “I know I’m unclean. I know I should not be here. I’m not allowed to touch other people. But what do I have to lose? If only I could weasel through all these people, if only I could work my way through the chaos and just touch his cloak, then I will be healed.” She managed to touch Jesus and, verse 29, **[SLIDE 18]** she could feel within herself that she was cured. She was set aright. Order had been restored. Then, like Jairus, she was horrified to find that Jesus had stopped! **[SLIDE 19]** He had noticed something! He wants to know what happened. What is he saying? Someone touched him? Is he serious? Verse 31 let’s us know this is exactly what the disciples were thinking. Of course someone touched you Jesus! Many, many people have touched you! The disciple’s reaction here is common sense. Jesus’ question simply comes off as silly. But Jesus does not ascribe to common sense. Something uncommon has happened. Jesus feels that power has left him. **[SLIDE 20]** A hint that Jesus’ ministry is not free. It costs something. It is a taxing process for Jesus. To heal is an act of love and love entails a giving away of one-self for the sake of the other. This power is available, and Jesus is willing, but let us never forget the cost associated with the gift. A certain amount of power has left Jesus.

The woman owns up to her actions. She comes forward with the truth. And instead of being met with anger or the punishment required by the law, in verse 34, Jesus commends her for her faith. Jesus refers to her as “Daughter”. For someone who has been separated from her family for at least 12 years, she is assured that she belongs and her disorder has been met with peace. Her storm has been calmed. But Jairus’ daughter was about ready to leave her family after only twelve years as well.

Then the report comes…Jesus is too late. **[SLIDE 21]** While he was attending to this woman, Jairus’ daughter had died. Jesus ignores the report. He speaks to Jairus, he speaks to the persecuted Christians in Mark’s audience, he speaks to each of us, **[SLIDE 22]** “Don’t be afraid, just keep trusting.”

As they approach the home, the chaotic wailing and weeping grows louder. Jesus enters the home with Peter, James and John and, let’s not forget that, Mark gets this account from Peter himself. He was one of the few to witness **[SLIDE 23]** Jesus taking the girl’s hand and speaking the words, “*Talitha Koum!”* “Little girl, arise!” Mark is careful to include the actual Aramaic words that Jesus spoke. He is also careful to explain exactly what those words mean. Commentator William Barclay surmises that Mark writes in the spoken language here because those words rang out so loudly in Peter’s telling of the story. Those words were so embedded in Peter’s own heart that Mark could not retell the story without these powerful words. “*Talitha Koum!”* and the girl does so. She stands restored and revived. Jesus tenderly advises that someone get her something to eat, but not without strictly reimplementing his secret. He warned those present to keep quiet about this miracle.

What gives? **[SLIDE 24]** Why does Jesus commission the man from Gerasa, but back on the other side of the lake, people are to keep quiet? We touched on this a bit last week in our discussion about parables. It is all a matter of timing and context. Jesus’ time had not yet come. The was ushering in the Kingdom of God. He was announcing the Good News. He was displaying the nature of his reign, how it looks and feels. But Jews and Gentiles will understand the reality of this kingdom in very different ways. The man across the lake is encouraged to tell the good news about God’s kingdom because he and his fellow Gentiles do not have a preconceived notion of what that kingdom ought to look like. But Jesus has first and foremost come to his own people. **[SLIDE 25]** The Jewish understanding of what God is going to do needs to be radically adjusted. They need to turn from trusting the power of the law and instead live into the power of faith. But it was still a time for sampling.

I don’t know how often you shop at Costco, **[SLIDE 26]** the bulk supplier of almost anything you could want, but if you go on the weekend, you will experience the crowd dynamic that Mark describes in this chapter with the added factor of oversized metal shopping carts. In addition to crowds, you will also find samples; **[SLIDE 27]** just a taste, a single bite of whatever product they happen to be promoting. It is only a small part of a complete meal. The whole idea is that from trying the sample, you will want more. From trying the sample, you will seek out the full product. That is what is going on here. **[SLIDE 28]** It is not yet time for Jesus to take the throne. The release date for the full product has not yet come. So what people experience is a sampling. A healing here, an exorcism there, a resuscitation here, a cleansing there. A teaching here, a parable there. Who is this man who wields such authority? Who is this man who expresses such mercy? Who is this man you speaks so wisely? Who is this man who wants to keep it all a secret? We know because Mark has told us from the beginning, this is **[SLIDE 29]** Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus, who brings purity to uncleanness, Jesus, who brings order to chaos, Jesus who expels demons, heals the sick, raises the dead. Jesus who brings the kingdom of God to a broken world. We get to live in that kingdom. Jesus comes to each of us, no matter how broken we might be, no matter how disordered or chaotic, no matter how dead. He takes our hand, he speaks: “*Koum!”* Stand! Arise! Live!

What we experience in this life might just be a taste, a sample of what is to come. But let what you taste and see spur you on to seek out Christ and the fullness of his kingdom with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. Tell others about it. Let them see Christ living in you as you live under his rule and his boundless, all-encompassing authority. Though the storms light rage and the chaos might overwhelm, don’t be afraid; just keep trusting. Amen.