

June 17th 2018 Mark 5: 1-20

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Can you see who Jesus is? These are the questions Mark keeps putting before us.

Last week we looked at how Jesus is with us in the boat, in life and it's storms. Copies of last week's sermon are in the sermons tray on the counter just outside the chapel and the sermon is also available on our YouTube channel.

After all the drama of the storm the disciples had to get straight back in the boat. In chapter 5 verse 1 Jesus says, "Let's go to the other side of the lake." Here is a picture. From Capernaum to Gerasenes is 21km.

They arrive in the area known as the Gerasenes. It's part of the Decapolis-the ten cities. It's gentile territory. That's why pigs are being farmed here, for pigs are 'unclean' for Israel so you won't find them in Galilee!

And when they arrive they are confronted with quite the scene. A man possessed by evil spirits so strong that chains cannot restrain him. Out of fear, the townsfolk have banished him to be in the caves where the dead are buried.

Do you remember in chapter one - who were the only ones who recognised who Jesus was? It was the demons! Here again this guy recognises Jesus true identity.

It is at this point that we could go and break down the events Mark explains in a great deal of detail. I want to take a slightly wider perspective with what Mark is telling us about Jesus.

Jesus is the Son of God. Mark tells us that in 1:1.

In last week we saw that, Jesus is in the boat with us, and how Jesus, as the Son of God, also has authority over nature. Here Mark shows how Jesus - as the Son of God - also has

authority over evil. We see that what he does causes the town to ask him to leave while the released demoniac becomes a brilliant proclaimer of the good news.

If Jesus has authority over nature and evil, what does this all mean for us as we seek to follow Jesus?

I don't see how we can even start to understand how to answer this question without dealing with the elephant in the corner, which is of course about, well let's describe it as the work of evil, demons and the devil.

Jesus treats evil as real and active. 'Deliver us from evil/the evil one' is right there in Matthew's version of the Lord's prayer in the sermon on the mount, and as recorded in the traditional form of the Lord's prayer which uses 'deliver us from evil', instead of the equally accurate translation of 'deliver us from the evil one'.

The contemporary version inexplicably changes 'deliver us from 'evil/the evil one' to 'the time of trial', which means something very different.

I say inexplicable but it is explicable really for we don't know how to deal with the mystery of the continuing presence of evil if Jesus has authority over it.

That is a big question which we don't have time for. If you are troubled with that question then I recommend this really helpful book that I brought from England with me, called the 'Enigma of Evil' by David Wenham.

What is Mark wanting us to see? Isaiah! Remember Mark has been called the Gospel of Isaiah, so often does he refer to it.

Listen to Isaiah 61:1 NLT

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.

Jesus comes to bring us life, freedom.

Mark wants us to see...that Jesus comes to break the chains that binds us.

Jesus came to destroy the works of the evil one.

What might those works be?

Throughout scripture the devil is portrayed as always trying to cause people to question the validity and authenticity of God's word.

When Peter tells Jesus in Mark 8:33 that he absolutely cannot be crucified - here is His response:

“Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. “Get away from me, Satan!” he said. “You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.””

Jesus ascribes to Satan Peter’s attempt to dissuade him from the Cross.

In Zechariah 3, Satan stands before God ready to accuse Joshua. Joshua is in filthy rags. A picture of his sin.

Satan is getting ready to accuse. I imagine the scene. He is getting ready to say things like:

“Look at the state of him.

Filthy!

And he is your high priest!

Not good is it! Not worthy of you is he?”

Not worthy are you Joshua?

Yet God doesn't let Satan speak!

God rebukes Satan but also does something about those filthy rags. He exchanges the filthy rags of Joshua with clean robes including a new turban! Joshua is clean from head to toe!! Such is the loving, mercy and grace of God.

Even the word “satan” means accuser...

Satan throughout Scripture does the same. He tries it with Job. With Jesus at His Temptation in the wildernesses. He tries it still. How many of us feel, or have heard an inner voice, which tells us “God can’t love you?”

However many times have we heard and read how loved we are, yet still we have those moments when a thought goes through us that God can’t love us or he doesn’t actually mean what he says, or it doesn’t apply to us.

That could be Satan up to his familiar tricks.

But before we start seeing demons in every bush and blame the devil for everything, as some churches are inclined to do, that voice could be our own ego too! As we have seen with the Enneagram in I. D., those inner ego messages that say we are not loved, loveable, perfect, kind, holy or good enough could be messages we picked up from others in childhood or our own personality.

So we need to strike a careful balance here. It would be a mistake to see every personal trial, struggle or temptation as the work of the devil or demons. If you have a persistent temptation to a particular weakness it does not mean you are demon-possessed. It would be very convenient to be able to blame His Nibs for our own inability to grow into maturity when actually each one of us is responsible to God for our own growth.

But it would also be a mistake to fail to grasp how serious Jesus and the consistent writings of Paul, Peter, James and John are when they call us to be alert, mindful, watchful about the devil and his attempt to destroy God's work in and through us.

1 John 3:8 says, "The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil."

So don't be fearful of any talk or Bible passages about Satan, demons and evil. The Living God dwells within you and Jesus has authority over heaven and earth. We trust and put our faith in the completeness of that authority and his redeeming work on the Cross. Paul describes the lies he throws at us as flaming arrows and that we need to be mindful of the devil's schemes.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil...With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one." Ephesians 6:10-11,16

So what is Mark trying to help us see about what it means to follow Jesus? Jesus is the Son of God who has good news from God, has power to forgive, heal, calm the winds, restore broken men and women to wholeness and He has power over evil.

This is the Jesus Mark presents. Do we accept or reject it?

We read in Psalm 139 that God goes everywhere with you. Do you believe it?

Jesus considers you worth dying for. Do you believe it?

Jesus dwells within you! Do you believe it?

Are we fearful of all talk of devils and demons even though Jesus has defeated evil and by his Spirit we can be victorious to? Do you believe He has that kind of power?

Your prayers are powerful. 'The devil trembles when he sees the weakest Saint upon His knees'. Do you believe it?

If not to all any or all of those, why not? Is it that you are being tempted to doubt God's love and word? Or is it your own ego telling you you are not loveable? What is necessary for you to accept God's truth about you?

We are all responsible for our own growth. Jesus came to set us free from the chains that bind us.

Mark reveals that Jesus is one who overcomes evil! Just as Jesus is with us in the storms of life, so Jesus is working to overcome the destructive voice of Satan and our own unhealed egos. He comes to not just die for our sins, but to also bring wholeness for our souls.

In the sight of this dramatic display of power: releasing this tortured man from his chains... the people & the town begged Jesus to leave. Rejection! In contrast the man delivered is also begging, but he begs to go with Jesus. Jesus says no, but using similar language to when he called the 12 apostles to be those who would go out with him to preach, so he sends him out to tell his family all about what God has done for him.

How much does this guy know at this point? About Jesus? Cross? Theology? Nothing! But he goes! So can we! For we can all tell of what God has done for us.

And we start with those closest to us. That's why, as you can read each week on the front cover of our bulletin, our vision statement uses the language that it does. Jesus sends us all to those in our lives to share what we have found!