

Tuesday I received a phone call from my wife telling me that my mother was missing. My mom, who has dementia, went for a drive...in a car...alone. I know what you're thinking, "Uh-oh." And you are right. I didn't know what to do. Do I drive to East Texas and look for her? Where would I start? So we waited until the report came that she had been found on a dirt road out in the country. Somehow she had turned onto a road that got worse and worse until she got the car stuck in the mud. Otherwise, she would have probably kept driving. We've had record amounts of rain lately. Sadly, some people lost their lives in the flooding. But my mom was saved...because she got stuck in the mud. The same storm resulting in death can result in life for another. I want to tell you about a storm today that could save your life. The story is found in Mark 4:35.

Jesus is preparing His disciples to take the gospel to some difficult people in some difficult places. When they experience resistance to their message they need to know that the power and authority of Jesus is greater than any other force in the universe. We're going to see in this passage that the only antidote to fear is fear. What happens to these disciples must happen in us if we are to be His faithful representatives.

Mk. 4:35...For an observant Jew going to the "other side" was a frightening prospect. The other side was where the Gentiles lived. Gerasa, situated on the East side of the sea of Galilee, is modern day Jerash in Jordan. It is one of the ten cities of the Decapolis, pagan Roman cities inhabited by Gentiles and famous for their idolatrous practices. We know this region was predominantly Gentile because there were pigs on the other side (5:11). Pigs were considered unclean. No Jew ever wanted to come in contact with pigs. Jesus deliberately took His disciples into hostile territory. He still does.

There is a huge gulf between where we sit today and where most of you will be tomorrow. In a few minutes you will leave the relative safety of people who believe like you and be deposited in a place populated by people who do not share your views. Some people prefer to avoid that world. They prefer to stay on the safe side of the lake and shout across to the other side, "Hey, you should be over here. You'll go to hell over there." But Jesus takes His disciples on a boat ride - right into the heart of pagan territory.

The lesson is that if you truly want to follow Jesus **He will take you farther and farther from the shore.** I love that poster that shows a sailing ship

surrounded by icebergs. The caption reads, “A ship is safe in the harbor... but that is not what ships were made for.” Jesus didn’t save us and give us abundant life so we could see how many blessings we could accumulate for ourselves. Jesus gave us life so we could give it away, so we could take His message “to all nations.” We naturally want to stay close to home and be with people who are like us. This is not an option for Jesus’ disciples. How do we get past the fear of “the other side?”

Mk. 4:36-41...Before Jesus calmed the storm they were afraid. After He calms the storm they are terrified (mega-afraid)! The disciples realize that they are in the boat with the One who controls the storms. The only thing more powerful than the storm is the One who controls the storm! And God is as unmanageable as the weather. That is why the Bible says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Fear is the natural human response to something dangerous and unpredictable. Anyone afraid of snakes? Why? Because they are unpredictable and capable of great harm. If you think a God will never allow you to go through a storm, think again. You can’t control God. You can’t predict how the Lord is going to transform you. That’s why they call Him “the Lord.” He does whatever He pleases. In other words, you don’t know Jesus until you don’t know Jesus!

Elisabeth Elliot says it beautifully, “God is God, and since He is God, He is worthy of my worship and my service. I will find rest nowhere else but in His will, and that will is necessarily, infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what He is up to.” (*Through Gates of Splendor*, p. 267)

The only antidote to fear is fear. We overcome the fear of life’s storms when we learn to fear Jesus more. There is a huge difference between a snake or a powerful storm and a powerful God. The difference is love. Perfect love casts out fear. God has our best interests in mind. Nothing touches you that doesn’t first pass through the hands of a loving God. Cancer, job loss, bankruptcy, the loss of a child or a spouse, even dying, these are not the worse things that can happen to a person. There are worse things than dying like living without purpose or dying without a legacy. Our respect for the power and purpose of God has to overshadow our respect for any of the things that frighten us. And the lesson isn’t quite over for the disciples yet.

Mk. 5:1-13. I smile when I read this because if I'm one of the disciples I'm thinking, "Lord, could we start out a little slower, like having a VBS for Gentile children and then maybe we could work our way up gradually to super-human, screaming, slashing demon-possessed tomb dwellers?"

Mk. 5:14-17... You would expect that all those who saw the miracle Jesus performed to be impressed and fall at His feet. But the transformation Jesus brings is bad for business. "If He keeps casting out demons we aren't going to have any pigs left." They are more concerned with their business interests than with the restoration of a human life.

When Paul preached in Ephesus the same thing happened. Acts 19 records there occurred, "no small disturbance" because of Demetrius the silversmith who was brining in "no little business" making silver statues of Artemis. If we let Paul keep preaching the Gospel Artemis will be "dethroned from her magnificence" (Acts 19:27) not to mention that this preaching is hurting our business.

You can recognize a true revival when the economy is impacted by the impact of the Gospel. In the accounts of the Welsh revival legend has it that the miners became less productive because their mules were not responding to their commands. They no longer shouted the profanities at their mules that the animals were accustomed to.

Mk. 5:18-20 reminds us that followers of Jesus embrace the power and simplicity of the Gospel... We preach a Gospel that has changed us in tangible ways. For the Gerasene demoniac the Gospel was not just a subject to be discussed, it was the power of God. He could say with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Ro. 1:16. The freedom that resulted from the power of Jesus over demonic forces provided a pretty convincing testimony.

This command in v. 19 a reversal of the Messianic Secret. (Mark 1:43; Mark 5:43; Mark 7:36; Mark 8:26). Jesus tells the man to, "Go tell everyone what has happened to you." Are you keeping a Messianic secret or will you tell someone what has happened to you? Will you take this message to "the other side." It is the message of the loving, life-giving sacrifice of one man for the salvation of all who believe.

I can't resist pointing out the parallel story of Jonah in the OT. Jonah was a man who was called by God to take a message to Nineveh. Because he feared the Ninevites, Jonah ran away, or sailed away to be more exact. He boarded a boat bound for Tarshish. The boat was overtaken by a storm. The sailors were full of fear. Jonah was asleep. They woke Jonah up and said, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"—for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. He said to them, 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you.'... "So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights." Jonah 1:11-12, 16-17

Jonah offered himself up to save the men on that boat. He was willing to die so that they would live. He spent three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish and lived to tell about it. Sound familiar? The Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign. He said the only sign you are going to get is the sign of Jonah... "Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." Mt. 12:40-41

God has called us to be messengers, missional viral agents who are spreading the news about Him everywhere – even to unfamiliar people in unfamiliar places. So start where you are and step outside your comfort zone. You can "go to the other side" right there at work. You can "go to the other side" right there in your neighborhood. Trust God and go to the other side. When you get there do what the Gerasene demoniac did, "He went away and began to proclaim... what great things Jesus had done for him." (5:20). You don't have to have an advanced degree in theology to be effective for Jesus, just tell others what He has done for you. So go ahead, what are you afraid of?