

Intro:

When was the last time you were put in a box?

Jesus' longs to show us who He is. Every chapter has showed us something a little different. Luke, our author, tends to group stories together by themes- not necessarily just by chronology. Slowly but surely he has been sharing with us what this great man Jesus is like. Our talks today and next week will emphasize Jesus' power and challenge us to respond to him with trust, abandonment, and mission.

All of this is of course crucial, regardless of how experienced we are in the spiritual journey. Because, like we emphasized last week and throughout the series- human flourishing is found in what God has in Jesus. We're not talking about getting more religious or churchy- we're talking about something much deeper and profound- living life as it was meant to be lived.

And so let's jump in our passage to see Jesus and ponder the implications for our lives today.

What do we learn about Jesus? What does it mean for us? Two things:

Jesus' great power over nature... calls us to respond with faith, not fear and panic, in the challenges of our journey.

What we see about Jesus:

The setup is clear- the sea is beyond his disciples (v.23) A number of them were fishermen, so it must have been quite a storm- I assume fishermen don't get scared easily by the sea. Jesus calms the storm, the people are amazed (v.25). He has power over nature. But this is not just amazing for what it seems at face value; it is likely that, in their mind, nature was a place of Yahweh's domain (Ps. 29:3, 65:7, 89:8-9; 107:23-30). How can a mere person do this? Jesus is more.

Our context: we don't see much of Jesus' power over nature these days, and part of the reason is because we don't see the vastness of nature much these days. We see the vastness of human creativity. And this can cause us to see less of God. Eugene Peterson, a famous Christian author, writes of how, growing up, he would go to the top of the Smith Tower in Seattle, at that time the highest building in the West. It would make him feel tall and important, infatuated with what humanity could accomplish. This felt so dangerous to him, because he grew up in the Rockies. There he would climb higher than the Smith Tower, and the vista would humble him and make him feel that there was something greater than him. There's something about being in God's creation that has the potential, if we're open to God and Jesus, to see Jesus and his power afresh.

Of course, we ought to recognize, too, that Jesus has power over all that we create as well. Political nation states, the global economy, any and ever force that seems to dictate our existence- the Bible is replete with statements that God has power over all.

But back to our passage- what do we learn in terms of how we ought to be responding to Jesus?

It's important to note how the disciples and Jesus interact here. At the outset of the storm, the disciples freak out- there's a lot of fear and panic for their lives. Now the question is, do they do the right thing with that fear and panic? Well, we would probably say yes- they come to Jesus. That's a good thing. Yet why does Jesus challenge them for lacking faith? Isn't faith coming to Jesus?

Faith seems to be more than that here. It seems to be about trusting Jesus, in the fact that what He says will happen, and not panicking. Jesus' only other words in this scene are- let us go to the other side. Jesus has said they're going there; why would you say we're going to drown here? Why did you not trust that what I said would come to pass?

Of course, this sort of faith does not come naturally; there's a process. I mean, the disciples should have trusted a little more and not panicked- they had seen Jesus perform miracles already, they were supposed to be the ones who, as notes in the opening of this chapter, received the revelation of the words of Jesus. But here they are, lacking faith. Jesus is gracious, yet Jesus still challenges them for more. He still wants faith, not fear and panic.

Are we moving toward faith, trust, in Jesus? Or has fear and panic been running our lives?

What do we see about Jesus? He has power over nature. How ought we respond? Faith, not fear and panic.

Jesus' great power over the demonic world... calls us to respond with abandon and mission, not fear and rejection.

The story continues to bring us to a second set of pictures of Jesus and our response.

What we see about Jesus:

Jesus now lands on the other side of the lake, at a town named Gerasene (v.26). Right when they land, this man comes to greet him. He's not just any man, of course- he most likely a Gentile man, who is not just socially unacceptable as a

homeless man, but also highly unclean according to Jewish tradition because of his living in tombs. But the clincher is that he is possessed- not just by one-demon, but a whole Legion- that is, about 4- 6000 demons. This is unlike anything Jesus has previously encountered, really- in all previous pictures we've received of Jesus, he has been dealing with one demon at a time.

Yet there is no sense that Jesus is ever not in control. Right at the get go, we read that the demons recognize their place before Jesus, and Jesus easily exercises his power over them. This whole thing with Jesus asking for their name- back in that context, having someone's name meant you had authority over them- Jesus gets his name quite easily.

Now, of course the intriguing part of the story is the whole thing about the demons going into the pigs as an alternative to going to the abyss. There are a lot of questions that the passage simply does not help us answer. The point of it, however, is to show the scale and magnitude of the situation, and show how Jesus has power over it. Mark's gospel will record that there are around 2000 pigs. Jesus' power over other spiritual forces is clear and decisive.

Our context: not all of us have encounters with demons, and so we may not really get how Jesus and his great power here. Some of us, of course, have- it is clear what you need to see about Jesus here. But there are spiritual things our culture that many of us acknowledge as having power and control over us. Karma, for example. Astrology. We will discover later that all religions have spiritual forces over them. Jesus would want to say, in no uncertain terms, He has ultimate power over all things spiritual. He is the ultimate authority and power to be dealt with. And, thankfully, his desire is to bring human flourishing with it- just look at how this man is now alright (v.35).

How we must respond:

The question is, again, how we are to respond. The response in this scene is much more drawn out. There are two, of course. And they couldn't be as different as they are is of fear and rejection (v.34-37). The second is of abandonment to Jesus and mission. (v.38-39)

Where are we today? Fear and rejection? Abandonment and mission?

Extra Study Notes:

v. 22- the location of this incident at Gerasenes has been debated, given that there is a city by that name some 20 miles away from the Sea of Galilee. Furthermore, Matthew 8:28 has the event in Gadara, a city that is 5 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee. There are multiple ways to understand this. The most probable among scholars is that the names Gerasenes and Gadara are used to refer to the region in general, even though the actual city name used is far from the Sea. A modern equivalent would be people saying they're from L.A. when they actually live in, say, the city of Santa Monica.

v. 22-25- That God has control over the sea is stated multiple times in the Old Testament. Ps. 29:3, 65:7, 89:8-9; 107:23-30

v. 31- The abyss is a place the Bible describes as being created/reserved for demons. Rev. 9:1-2, 11; 11:17; 17:8; 20:1-3.