

No Turning Back- Living the surrendered life Lesson 5

Have you ever had something "take your breath away"? Maybe it was at a wedding, the doors open and the bride and groom see each other for the first time in a whole new way.

Perhaps it was at the birth of your child. What an amazing miracle! There is nothing else like it...ever. You might find yourself in awe, or amazement, when you find yourself in a location you've wanted to see for a very long time. It could be a place like the Grand Canyon, the Great Wall of China, or the Taj Mahal.

I remember when Helen and I went to Niagara Falls... I simply couldn't stop looking at it. I was amazed by the beauty and power.

Have you ever been amazed before like when Helen and I went into the Nashua church to sing with their praise team, only to walk into a room of some 150 people shouting "surprise!!" We were amazed!!

This series of lessons has highlighted how Jesus has done amazing things. From his baptism, to the disciples witnessing Jesus cast out demons, healing the sick and diseased, and seeing Jesus redefine family to his mighty act of calming a stormy sea. These guys have seen amazing things.

And now we see Jesus and the disciples going to the other side of the lake to the region of the Gerasenes where evidently Jesus gets out of the boat (leaving the disciples behind, as they no doubt are still consumed by the fear they have in Mark 4:41) to meet this haunting figure of a man with an evil spirit who lives in the cemetery. As I ponder the story we'll be looking at this morning it's not too far fetched to feel the same kind of uneasiness or eeriness that happens when you watch a thriller movie or read a Steven King novel. The story is a little on the haunting side of things.

I've noticed that for the first time in Mark, Jesus and the disciples are not in Jerusalem or even in Galilee. This story in Chapter 5 is not a story about a group of good old God-fearing country people who come out to hear from God. Instead this is an intriguing story about pig farmers and people who live in cemeteries. Mark 5 is sort of like another parable of the Good Samaritan. It's a story about those who are shunned by society.

Could these pig farmers be Jews? If so, something doesn't really add up here. Pigs and Jews are not like salt and pepper. Perhaps these pig farmers were Gentiles, which says even more about Jesus extending the kingdom of God to the one's others say are unworthy. Like the parable of the Good Samaritan, even the "lesser ones" of society receive the kingdom. But this is no parable. This really happened.

The story grows even more fascinating when the demons introduce themselves to Jesus as they have this unusual conversation with him.

"We know what you are about to do. We know you want this guy..." so they beg Jesus to let them go into the pigs.

Evidently Jesus "gave them permission" to do so. Mark is pretty clear that these hams freak-out as any herd of pigs would when possessed by demons. I can imagine what that must have sounded like... I've seen pigs when they get excited--and let me tell you, it's pretty noisy.

I told you it was an interesting story. But we have yet to reach Mark's point of the story. If this story is about Jesus, it is also about "the people." And there are plenty of "the people" in this story.

There are the disciples, who other than the word "they" in 5:1, they are completely absent. Mark shines the spotlight on Jesus--and only Jesus in this story. As far as we know, the disciples sat in the boat the whole time. But there are other "people" involved in this story.

Here is the second part of that story, Read Mark 5:14-20:

There are the pig farmers, who make up one of the groups that this story is really about. These pig farmers have an announcement to make. I'm reminded of the announcement that some shepherds in Luke 2:17-18 make. These shepherds come and announce good news about the coming Son of God. However, Mark does not say that these pig farmers announce the arrival of the Son of the most High God, or the restoration of the demon possessed man to sanity, nor the good news of the death of a legion of demons. Instead Mark shows us that these pig farmers announce that their own livelihood has just taken a nose dive off a cliff and into the sea.

And **"the people"** who hear this announcement respond. They come running to the shoreline, see the calmed madman sitting next to Jesus, and like the disciples in Mark 4:41, they are **"afraid."**

Then **"the people"** gather around Jesus and beg him to leave.

As all this happens, Jesus does not say a word, but gets back into the boat. The healed man who was demon possessed begged to go with Jesus. But instead of inviting him along, Jesus commissions the man to one of the first preaching jobs known in the Christian world.

And so they part company and "the healed man" goes to the cities to the east and begins his ministry. This story tells us something that we will get used to hearing in Mark: **"The people" were amazed.**

But what most interests me in this story is that there is four groups of "the people" just as there are four kinds of soil that Jesus talked about just hours earlier (Mark 4:3-20).

1. There are "the people" like the disciples who watch what happens but say nothing.
2. There are "the people" who see what happens-- but panic.
3. There are "the people" who hear about what happens-- but panic.
4. And there are "the people" who hear about what happens and find themselves amazed.

You know, in some ways this is the same story as the crazy boat ride at the end of Mark 4. Jesus not only calmed the storm on the water, but also calms the storm that rages inside a man who had been exiled from his society and sent to live among the dead as though to say, "This community will not only be better off without you, but cannot wait until that day comes."

But Jesus comes along and meets the man and gives him worth. Jesus gave worth to a man in whom the community no longer saw any worth. I bet that idea hits home with many who read it.

Jesus sees worth in you. Jesus sees more worth in you than perhaps you are even able to see in yourself. Jesus is not only the one who calms the storm-- Jesus is not only the one who does not leave me in the boat by myself-- Jesus is not only the one who never leaves me nor forsakes me, but he is the very one who gives me worth, who gives me life.

But in other ways this story goes off in a different direction than the story of the crazy boat ride. Mark 5:1-20 is asking us a big life question: **Do we still have the capacity to be amazed by Jesus?**

We struggle to hear this story the way the people of the story did. And we cannot seem to hear it the way Mark's early listeners did. Many people have heard the stories of Jesus so many times that we have grown comfortably numb to the awesome power and boundless grace that comes in a story like this.

There is a difference between being amazed by Jesus and reading a story about Jesus.

If Satan has any power in this world-and I believe he does-- then it is the power to cheat us of the awe that comes when amazed by God. Satan's power is to cheat us so much so that even the actions of God become routine in our sight and become routine in our hearing. **God forbid!**

Don't miss it now! Jesus is seeking the living among the dead as he goes to the possessed man who dwells among the tombs. The people think he is a foregone conclusion. They look at him as simply waiting to die. They gave up on him long ago. But Jesus sees worth, and Jesus shows mercy.

In the same way that Jesus healed the paralytic in Mark 2, Jesus heals the man of his demons in Mark 5. Whether Jesus says, "Take your mat and go home" or "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." the people who witnessed these events were simply amazed.

Mark 2:11,12 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This **amazed** everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Mark 5:20 "So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed."

Jesus was only with this man for a few moments, but changed the course of the man's life forever. **How much more mercy might Jesus show you?**

The question of Mark 5:1-20 is not "Where is your faith?" but "Where is your **amazement?**" Only when we can be amazed can we return to the question of faith that comes to the surface again in the next incident of healing a woman and a daughter and growing a man's faith.

The people of the Gerasenes gave up on the man who walked around the cemetery in broken chains. On that day when the pigs went swimming, Jesus showed us that no one is beyond his reach. No one!

When a community of faith gives up on anyone, we give up on the possibility that God still shows mercy, perhaps to even you and me. Whether told to leave home and share the message, or told to

go back home and share the message, it is God who sends and God who gives us words to speak. God forbid that we ever become more concerned with keeping the pigs happy than we are with healing a man created in the image of God.

Church... We are all about healing...

Now healed, dressed, and in his right mind, the man made whole says what we all must say: "The Lord has shown me mercy." Knowing myself as well as I know myself-and I would think it safe to say-you knowing yourself as well as you know yourself, that alone is reason enough to be completely amazed.

The Lord has shown me mercy."

(Show Video)

Are you amazed?

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