

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene
Sunday November 13, 2005 – 9 & 11 AM

How Far Would He Go? **Mark 5:1-20**

Theologian Michael Lodahl writes: *“It is the central theme of the Christian story, the heart of the Church’s preaching and sacraments, that Jesus is the Savior of the world. The good news we proclaim is that God, in His matchless love, has taken the initiative in the person of Christ to redeem fallen humanity enchained in sin, to reconcile us to Himself, to restore us in the divine image. This is through and through the work of God, who ‘was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them.’ (2 Cor. 5:19).”*¹

How far would Jesus go to redeem and restore human life? **How far would He go?**

Read – Mark 5:1-20 (p. 994 or 1050 in your pew bibles).

Our text today is a horror story of Jesus’ encounter with a demon possessed man in a cemetery. The story actually begins at the end of the previous chapter of Mark’s gospel. Mark is very intense and writes a fast-paced narrative that powerfully tells God’s story of the good news of Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this story.

After a long day of teaching and ministering to the crowds (mostly Jews), He directs His disciples to get into a boat and set out for the “other side” of the lake (the Sea of Galilee). You know the story. As Mike began to tell us last week, Jesus was tired and falls asleep in the boat along the way. A sudden violent storm comes upon them and the disciples are afraid they will capsize and drown. They wake up Jesus Who demonstrates His power over the forces of nature by calming the wind and the sea. This story is connected to our text for today where Jesus demonstrates His power over the forces of evil as he delivers the demoniac. Today’s story reveals “the saving power of Jesus in the face of the destructive, demonic forces that distort and pervert human life.” Both stories reveal that Jesus is truly divine.

Our text tells us that they came to the “region of the Gerasenes” – Gentile country. Why would Jesus go there? Didn’t he understand the customs and the Law of the Hebrew people. Gentiles were unclean. Their cities and communities were no place for a Jew. The passage tells us, in verse twenty, that the ten cities of the area were known as the Decapolis, a Greek name – a Gentile name. There was even a herd of pigs there – Hello! – Unclean! What was Jesus thinking? He knows the Law...

Lev 11:7-8 - And the pig, though it has a split hoof completely divided, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. 8 You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.

A Jew reading this gospel would already be feeling very uneasy about these Jewish men being in this unclean Gentile area. Jesus was compelled to teach and minister, but

How Far Would He Go?

They had started out from the other side in the evening, so by now it was probably dark. Jesus is met by the demonic man immediately, although in verse six, it says that the man saw Jesus from a distance and came to Him. He came “from the tombs, and lived in the tombs” the text tells us (v. 2-3). In the Jewish priestly Law, one would be considered unclean for a week if they touched a corpse (Num. 19:11). This whole concept gave a general sense of uncleanness to cemeteries. In Palestine, natural caves in the limestone hills would serve as graves or tombs. They could also be used as shelter, but one wouldn’t live in the caves that were used as graves, unless they were demon possessed. There was already the belief that the tombs were haunted by demons. Where else would this outcast of the community have to live? Jesus had to know all this.

How fare would he go?

The man was also violent and couldn’t be controlled even with chains. What could be more unclean than a man possessed by uncleanness itself? The man was insane – a whack job – almost inhuman. The text tells us (v. 4-5) that this man had been chained hand and foot, but tore the chains apart and broke the iron fetters. No one was strong enough to subdue him. He would scream out night and day from the tombs and cut himself (sounds eerily familiar to today’s youth). According to the Law this behavior was forbidden. **Lev 19:28 – *Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD.***

In Luke’s gospel it is recorded ...

Luke 8:27 – *Then Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.*

To add further shame and indignity to this story, Luke tells us that the man was naked. He was a naked, bloody, insane, evil, vile, violent, scary, screaming maniac who lived in the graveyard. When he appeared before Jesus in the darkness and eeriness of the cemetery, I can only imagine the reaction of the disciples, maybe shrinking back behind Jesus in fear. What were they doing here? What was Jesus going to do in this situation? They had seen Him act in love and compassion toward people before.

How far would He go?

Our text says that the man came and fell before Jesus – not to worship Him, but in respect because he knew he had confronted one greatly superior to himself. The man yells out to Jesus by name, “***What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God.***” (v.7). Had Jesus’ fame reached this area? How does the man know Jesus name? The demon(s) within the man recognized the deity of Jesus by using the title to address him. However, he does not do this to yield to God, but rather to control the situation. He knows Jesus could destroy him/them, so there is plea. The torturer begs not to be tortured. Doesn’t that fit so well with the ways of the enemy? He asks Jesus to swear to God that He won’t torture him. The one who causes so much fear actually fears the One who can destroy evil. The demon knows he will be exorcized and asks not to be sent to the Abyss, Luke tells us (Lk. 8:31). This is the place of confinement before the final judgment and is also spoken about in Rev. 20:1-3.

Jesus confronts this nameless victim as a person of dignity by asking his name. The rest of society and even his family has disowned him completely. ***“He begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.”*** (v. 10).

He doesn't want to go the Abyss, but begs to be released into the herd of pigs. Jesus allows this. The demon(s) bent on destroying the life of this poor man instead destroy the lives of 2000 or so pigs as they run down the cliff and are drowned. Jesus gave the man and the people there evidence that the demons had actually come out of the man, and that their purpose was to destroy the man just as they destroyed the pigs. The people that saw this happen ran to tell others what was going on. This brought many back to the scene of this powerful event.

Mark 5:15 - *When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.*

The people could not believe their eyes. This insane lunatic of a man was now completely rational and normal. Before he was naked – now he was clothed. Before he was out of his mind – now he was quietly sitting with Jesus fully sane. Before he was so violent that chains couldn't hold him – now he was at peace with the Savior of the world. Jesus brought the salvation of God to a lost and dying Gentile outcast.

How far would he go?

Instead of rejoicing, Mark tells us that the people are afraid and ask Jesus to leave their vicinity. How many more could have been helped, delivered, or saved on this trip? God extends His grace to everyone with the power to back it up and make a difference in human lives. They rejected Jesus – the Savior of the world. The people were told about the miracle, the deliverance and about the pigs too (v. 16), but instead of embracing the One who had such compassion, they ask Him to leave their region.

Jesus starts to leave as directed, and the man who was delivered asks to come with Him – sounds normal to me. Jesus was the only person who showed this man and dignity or respect as a human being, and then He restored him to physical, spiritual, and social well-being. Wouldn't you want to go with Jesus after that and follow Him anywhere He went? But Jesus says, No! He wanted this man, who had been pushed out of family and society to go back home and restore the relationships what were previously severed.

(v.19) Jesus tells Him, *Go ... and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.* 20 *So the man went away and began to tell ... how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.*

The same divine mercy that brought Jesus to a Gentile graveyard would finally take him to a Roman cross to redeem and restore human life. **That's how far he would go!**

This same mercy, as powerful and able to deliver and transform lives as it is, cannot be forced on anyone. Humans are given the free will to accept or reject the mercy of God. Any person can reject the atonement accomplished in Christ. It is God's mercy working in humanity to stir the heart toward a need for God and for the salvation He offers in Jesus Christ. Recognize the hunger or thirst He has put within you as God tugging at your heart to be in a loving relationship with Him.

Max Lucado – A Love Worth Giving – p. 152-153 – Ants on the golf green.

How far would He go?

This story was recorded to show how vile this situation is to Jewish customs and Law. Yet, Jesus comes with compassion to heal rather than abandon, and to transform rather than condemn. What could you have done that could compare to this? What sin, what habit, what lifestyle, what evil do you think could possibly prevent Jesus from having compassion and mercy on you.

Michael Lodahl writes, *“There is no situation, no matter how bleak and apparently hopeless, into which Jesus is unwilling or unable to enter in order to bring divine healing and deliverance. All of His upbringing in Jewish law would have been screaming at Him to get out of there, and fast! – but compassion and love, the driving forces of God’s offer of salvation to us, said otherwise.”*¹

William Gladstone, in announcing the death of Princess Alice to the House of Commons, told a touching story. The little daughter of the Princess was seriously ill with diphtheria. The doctors told the princess not to kiss her little daughter and endanger her life by breathing the child’s breath. Once when the child was struggling to breathe, the mother, forgetting herself entirely, took the little one into her arms to keep her from choking to death. Rasping and struggling for her life, the child said, “Momma, kiss me!” Without thinking of herself the mother tenderly kissed her daughter. She got diphtheria and some days thereafter she went to be forever with the Lord. Real love forgets self. Real love knows no danger. Real love doesn’t count the cost. The Bible says, “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.”

How far would He go?

Don’t let the enemy of our souls trick you into thinking that Jesus wouldn’t do the same thing for you. He already went that far for us. Don’t reject His mercy and grace.

1. The Story of God, Wesleyan Theology & Biblical Narrative, Michael Lodahl
Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, Kansas City, Missouri © 1994