

MARK LOVE WINS By What Authority?

In my opinion, one of the most important questions anyone can ask is this:
What kind of God do I have?

So, friends, what kind of God do you have?

There are two talks today.

Talk number one.

Mark chapter 4 v 35-41 tells the story of Jesus calming the storm. He has just spent time with Jesus the teacher, but now he will spend time with Jesus confronting the formidable forces of nature, demons, illness and death. And maybe he's answering the question, at least in part: what kind of God have you got?

After teaching the people, Jesus and his disciples get in a boat to cross to the other side of the lake. While crossing the lake, a furious storm blows up and threatens everyone in the boat. The disciples, some of them hardened, experienced fishermen, very familiar with storms on the sea, were terrified. They were so terrified, they thought they were all going to drown. Jesus, however, given the honoured place in the stern of the boat, is asleep with his head on a cushion.

In their panic, the disciples wake Jesus: "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (v38) Jesus, when he wakes, simply commands the wind and waves to 'Be still' The disciples, terrified by the storm, are now terrified by the one who can calm it.

In those moments in the boat that day, they were confronted with Jesus, the one who has authority over the chaos of the storm. In those moments in the boat that day, they were confronted with Jesus who was, in the words of John, with God in the beginning and through whom all things were made. In fact, without him, nothing was made that has been made. In those moments in the boat that day, they were confronted with Jesus who can speak to the wind and waves. In those moments in the boat that day, they were confronted with Jesus who is at home with his creation, even when it goes wild.

The disciples are left wondering: 'What kind of God is this?'

If that was not enough for the disciples, when they get to the other side of the lake, they meet a man filled with demons.

Just like the storm, this man is out of control, and everyone lives in fear of him. This man, whether he knows it or not, is beyond human help. Evidently the demons at work in this man know who Jesus is. When Jesus commands them to come out of the man, they asked to go into the pigs on the hillside. In this act, the disciples, and all those present are confronted with Jesus who has power over evil. In this act, the disciples and all those present are confronted with Jesus who is able to restore even those 'on the other side.' In this act, the disciples, and all those present are confronted with Jesus, who brings peace to a man thought to be beyond help.

Mark tells us the people present were amazed at what they saw. The disciples, no doubt, are again left wondering, what kind of God is this? It seems this God, this man Jesus, has authority over nature and over demons.

What kind of God do you have?

Back on the other side of the lake, Mark continues to reveal what kind of God this Jesus is. He has two stories interwoven, and in these two stories, Jesus confronts illness and death. You can read these stories in Mark 5 v 21-43.

There is quite a contrast in these stories, between the two people who come to Jesus for help. Jairus was an important synagogue officer. The woman was, and is, anonymous, but suffering an incurable disease.

Jairus comes to Jesus because his daughter is dying and there is no hope. He comes in public to ask Jesus to save the life of his little girl. He speaks to Jesus and expresses a faith that if Jesus is present, he can restore his daughter to life. He comes with an act of humility by falling at Jesus feet. He is willing to risk the ridicule of his fellow Jews for the sake of his daughter, a move which may end his career. He goes to Jesus to beg for his help.

A desperate woman with an incurable disease wants to remain anonymous. She demonstrates a completely different kind of courage. With all the energy she can muster, both physical and emotional, she pushes and barges her way through the crowd that surrounds Jesus. She hopes only to touch his cloak to receive the healing she so desperately needs and believes Jesus can give her. She doesn't want to be seen. She knows she is impure and unclean, but she has

no money left – so Jesus is now her only hope. She planned to slip away quietly so as not to draw attention to herself.

Two contrasting lives, both desperate to meet Jesus, find that this Jesus meets them exactly where they are. As Jesus begins to make his way towards Jairus's house, he causes confusion by asking: "Who touched me?" The disciples don't understand the question: "lots of people are touching you – we are in a crowd." But Jesus stops, and to her surprise and shock, he asks the crowd: "Who touched me?" The woman, who was healed when she touched his cloak, figures she should own up, because she knows she's healed. By making the healing public, Jesus shows that there is a limit to the ability of even the cleverest to cure illness, even the best of science, but that he, Jesus is ahead and beyond them as one who has power and authority over something they do not.

Almost before he finished speaking to the woman, a messenger comes to tell Jairus his daughter is dead. Its now too late, nothing can be done, its all over apart from burial. Jesus tells Jairus not to be afraid, and continues to Jairus's house. On arrival he tells everyone the girl is not dead but only sleeping. Imagine hearing that? "Your daughter is not dead, she is only sleeping!"

Once in the house, Jesus takes her by the hand, and literally says to her: "Little lamb, arise!" By telling her to get up, Jesus shows that death is not the problem to him that it is to Jairus and his family, and all those present. Those present were astonished. And the disciples were again wondering: What kind of God is this?

They have seen Jesus exercise authority over the formidable forces of nature, over demons, over illness, over death. Who is this Jesus? And what kind of God is this?

So, friends, what kind of God have you got?

Talk number two.

What do you do with a God who has authority over the formidable forces of nature, over demons, over illness, over death? How do we respond to a God like that? Mark wrote his Gospel to communities facing extreme and intense stress and a raging storm of persecution. And his Gospel is written to encourage them, in the midst of life as they experienced it, to lift their eyes

from what they could see in front of them, to the bigger and better story of the God who is revealed in Jesus.

Perhaps what's happening in the boat on the sea that day, is that a deep truth about the storm is being revealed. While the storm rages around Jesus and the disciples, the deep and profound truth is that, in all its chaos, the storm is not a threat to Jesus, the king of the universe. Jesus is perfectly safe in the middle of the storm, however violently it rages, so he can sleep.

What this story does not teach, is that, if we follow this Jesus, if we say we put our trust in him, our 'storms' will simply disappear. Storms have a habit of developing quickly, out of seemingly nowhere, with sometimes devastating consequences. The disciples, some of them, were hardened sailors, fishermen, who knew the sea on which they were with Jesus. This was familiar territory. This was part of life they knew about, and understood. Yet, in this storm, they were terrified and thought they would die.

Jesus does not save them from the experience or reality of the storm. In fact, he is the one who tells them they are going to the other side of the lake and to get into the boat. The truth is, storms are part of our lives, and no-one escapes them. It may also be true that some storms come precisely because we chose to get in the boat with Jesus and go where he leads us!

But here's the question: Who would you most want in the boat when the storm comes? Following this God is not a refuge from the uncertainties and insecurities of life, but it is to live without fear of those uncertainties and insecurities because our God is the God who is at home in his creation even when it goes wild. Perhaps right now, in your life, the choice before you in the storms you face, is to invite Jesus into the boat, knowing the storm is no threat to him.

We see the presence of evil today in many ways:

- The wars that rage between nations and people groups
- The injustice caused by racism, sexism, ageism.
- The abuse of power by those who lord it over others
- The structure of institutions that favour the rich over the poor
- The exploitation of others for profit

Satan comes only to kill, steal and destroy. We see it in the way some communities treat others – ostracising them and treating them as 'other'. And

sometimes the effects of evil ruin the lives of individuals. But we must be careful to hold the work of the evil one in its proper place.

The story Mark tells reminds us we need not fear, or become obsessed with evil because Jesus is stronger. Perhaps the question we most need to answer is something like this: Where in my life might I be held captive to something that stops or prevents me being fully free?

One commentator noted, in responding to this story, that it is sometimes true that those who most need to be freed from something, are those who resist the most.

How are you doing friends?

Might it be true of you, that God longs to free you to live to your full potential, but you are holding onto what holds you back? The evil one comes to kill, steal and destroy, but Jesus comes to bring life in all its fullness.

What kind of God have you got?

As we read Mark's Gospel we see that Jesus leaves behind him a trail of transformed scenes, changed situations and people whose lives will never be the same again. Jesus has authority over sickness and death, but these stories do not teach that every touch heals, or we will not hear words like: 'Your little girl is dead.'

There is no explanation of why a loving God lets evil continue to exist or why inexplicable events still challenge our lives. In truth, both the woman and the girl only received temporary miracles. Perhaps, equally important as demonstrating Jesus's authority over illness and death, these stories demonstrate that our God is able! And perhaps this is something that Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego grasped in the face of Nebuchadnezzar's fury.

¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (Daniel 3 v 17-18)

Perhaps what we see in Daniel's friends, Jairus and an anonymous woman, is the exercise of faith in the God who is able. Faith that opens the door to the power of God. Faith that shows the persistence in overcoming obstacles. Faith

that leads to action. Faith that holds onto the truth that Jesus is sufficient to meet whatever needs we have.

Friends, what kind of faith do you have?

What kind of God do you have?

Mark encourages us to look up, to ask the question: Who is this Jesus? Who is this God?

Maybe another way to express what I think I've been trying to say this morning, might be captured in these words:

But now, this is what the LORD says—

he who created you, Jacob,

he who formed you, Israel:

¹“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

²When you pass through the waters,

I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers,

they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,

you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.

³For I am the LORD your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;

I give Egypt for your ransom,

Cush and Seba in your stead.

⁴Since you are precious and honoured in my sight,

and because I love you,

I will give people in exchange for you,

nations in exchange for your life.

⁵Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

I will bring your children from the east

and gather you from the west. (Isaiah 43 v 1-5)

³¹What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave

him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8 v 31-39)

Friends, this is our God!

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