

Dehumanizing, Rehumanizing

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Date: 04 November 2012

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] Well, at the 9 o'clock service, David Short was leading the service, and he asked if people did okay with Halloween, and you survived it okay, and it looks like all of you did.

He said one of the things that happened to him is that he had children coming to the door, and one of the kids saying trick-or-treat was dressed as an Anglican clergyman.

And so we're kind of in therapy about that, and hoping we're not scaring anybody with that. So if you're new here, this is how we dress in the front, and I hope it doesn't affect you negatively.

Also, if you're new with us, we've been going through the Gospel of Mark, and it has been a journey for us that has been, I think, something that really brings goodness into our lives, changes us, brings us close to God as well.

And I hope that this is something that happens as we meet today as well. The last two weeks, we've been talking about storms. David preached on this incredible storm that came up with the disciples in a very vulnerable boat.

[1 : 11] And the power of nature, the destructive power, has dominated our news in the last week with Hurricane Sandy. And we should pray for all those who are affected by that devastating storm.

It was one that created a massive amount of damage and suffering. And there were questions as to why there was such a massive storm surge, because the winds weren't as high as some of the other hurricanes that have had less damage.

But there's a new way of determining the power of a storm that looks at all of the winds across the whole cross-section of a storm.

And so scientists can measure this in a unit called Integrated Kinetic Energy, which I'm sure you all knew about, IKEs. And what they did with Sandy is they measured it at 140 terajoules, which is the same power as two atomic bombs.

It's a massive, powerful storm. And the disciples, what we heard last couple weeks, experienced something of that kind of power in nature.

[2 : 21] And yet they also saw Jesus, by a word, speak to the waves and to the wind. And they saw the wind stop. But not only that, the waves suddenly, in a second, flatten out to be a glassy lake.

And of course, their question is, I mean, there is actually fear when they see that kind of power.

They say, who is this that even the waves and the wind obey him?

In the reading that we just heard in Mark 5, there is a different kind of storm. It is inside a person, not outside of us.

And it is spiritual evil. Spiritual evil throughout human history has caused far more damage than any hurricanes have.

Their destructive power is greater. There has been havoc wreaked on earth by evil. And yet we will see again by a word that Jesus calms that kind of storm as well in our passage today.

[3 : 24] And we see his power. And it is awesome. Awesome. We are in the midst of four very amazing miracles that happen in the Gospel of Mark.

We had the one from last week, in which the disciples are facing death. And they are saved in the storm. This week, there is a dead man who is walking.

And that is this man who is possessed. And next week, we are going to hear about a woman with a terrible condition of bleeding that's getting worse and worse. She will die from it. And we will also see a girl, a young girl who dies.

And Jesus brings her back to life. And so you see, we're in a section where we're seeing death like a dark storm cloud that is at the backdrop of everything. It's a storm that comes as a result of the sin and evil in the Garden of Eden.

But in the darkness of those four accounts, we are able to see the brightness of Jesus. His light grow brighter and brighter.

[4 : 30] He literally reverses the power of death and evil. And you realize here how immense and how absolute the power and the authority of Jesus is over all of the powers of the world, even the power of death.

And this is frightening in one way for people that don't know Jesus. But the thing that we know that is so wonderful, and we hear this in about five chapters from now, is that Jesus says, I came, in other words, I bring my authority for this purpose, not to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many.

In other words, he gives his life in order that many might have life and be released to a new life with him. That is the purpose of his authority coming into this world.

And that is what we see in the life of one man in Mark 5. And I'd like you to turn to page 840, because here we see an amazing passage about a man who Jesus takes powerfully from spiritual death to eternal life.

And we're going to see a contrast from the beginning to the end of this passage, which is really earth-shattering in one way, certainly for this man. It is eternal. Now, what happens is that Jesus, at the beginning of chapter 5, comes to the other side of the sea.

[6 : 04] And that's after the disciples and Jesus have experienced this incredible night of storm. And they get here in the morning to the shore. The disciples probably wonder, why are we here?

And immediately, a man comes who is possessed by demons, by evil spirits. And he lives this awful life that's described in verses 3 through 6.

He is living a life that's banished from the community. He's chosen to live far away from the towns. He walks among the tombs of the dead and the mountains.

And he screams constantly. He is in torment. And he cuts himself with stones. It is a dehumanizing life because Satan has gotten hold of him.

And people have tried to treat him by binding him up. And he has shackles and chains on him in the past. But he has an unnatural strength, a strength that doesn't come from him.

[7 : 03] And he breaks those chains and he breaks the shackles into pieces, it says. And so we see a man who is physically and emotionally a wreck.

He is at war with God. He is at war with other people. He's actually at war with himself as well. And there is nothing that can help him.

He is a dead man walking. And all earthly power has no ability to help this man. But in verses 6 through 9, he encounters Jesus.

And everything changes. So if you look in verse 6, you see that he sees Jesus from afar. And it says here that immediately this man runs at Jesus.

It's almost as though he sees that Jesus is invading his territory. He's invading his life. And really, Jesus is invading.

[8 : 06] Because this is a place that is far away from God in Jewish thinking. Jewish thinking would understand that anything that is impure should not come into the presence of God.

But here they are in a spiritually unclean place, which is Gentile territory. They are amongst unclean tombs. And there's a man with an unclean spirit.

All in the context of a place where there are unclean pigs, thousands of them, feeding on the pastures around them. And what happens is that in this ritually unclean place, that's considered to be far away from God, Jesus chooses to come and personally invade this man's life.

And he invades this place with his grace and his love and new life. And when I read this, I couldn't help but think of Ratnak International, which St. John's partners with.

One of its ministries is to a neighborhood in Cambodia with rampant child prostitution and slavery. It is a place of darkness and evil. People who have gone there from our church have sensed that evil and the darkness.

[9 : 24] But Jesus has chosen to invade that place for years. It's a remarkable story. His gospel is changing people.

He is freeing them and giving them a new life of healing and serving God. And not only that, but physically, God is transforming that place.

So he's changing the neighborhood so that brothels have become churches. And places of slavery have become parks. They've been raised and become parks where our children play, freely play

together.

It is a picture of God invading the dark world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's very hard going for ministry and Christian workers there. We should pray for them.

But they are clearly part of Jesus' joyful invasion of this world. Now, the disciples see something happening as a result of the invasion.

[10:24] They see this man from far off running towards them. He's wild. He's desperate. He's screaming, probably. And they had lots of time as he's making his way towards them to wonder, we've just been through a storm.

Why this now? Why is this happening to us? What is going to take place? But what happens is, jumping down to verse 8, because that comes first, when the man gets close, Jesus simply speaks to this man, just like he spoke to the wind and the waves.

And he commands this. He says, come out of the man, you unclean spirit. Now, we have to think about what Jesus is doing here, because he appears to be speaking to spiritual evil, a strange thing to do.

And I wonder if what we make of this in respectable, enlightened, and educated Vancouver. What do we think about this? We really only have three hypotheses as to what's happening here.

One is that Jesus was really above the superstition of believing in evil spirits. And he was accommodating himself to the culture of the day in doing this.

[11:39] So he was above superstition, but playing along with it. Or secondly, Jesus was not enlightened, that he had fallen into the superstitions of that culture and that time of first century Palestine.

That could be another thing that's going on. Or thirdly, spiritual evil is real. And Jesus' rule over evil is real.

And he came to release people from it and to one day destroy it. And so his teaching would be vital for us to know. We have to make up our minds which of those three we are going to choose and we're looking at what the Bible is clearly talking about, a spiritual evil.

But there's no doubt where Mark is coming down. He knows beyond a doubt that Satan and demon possession is real and that Jesus has complete power over it and all evil.

He's describing a scene that the eyewitnesses told him about. And what Mark sees here is that there is an instant effect to Jesus' words, which is remarkable.

[12:50] The man immediately falls down before Jesus and he cries out these unusual words. He says, And you see there's something very revealing about what's happening here.

The evil powers in this man know Jesus' authority over them. And they know that they can do nothing but bow down before him.

They don't have a choice. And they know that he is the son of the most high God who came into the world to destroy the power of sin and evil and death.

And that's why they say, Do not torment us. They know what Jesus' mission is. It is to destroy that evil and put an end to it forever. It's the destiny of all of these evil spirits.

And Jesus goes on to draw out who it is that he is talking to. He commands them to name themselves. And the spirit answers, My name is Legion, for we are many.

[13:54] And that word Legion is the name for the largest military unit in the Roman Empire. It was about 6,000 soldiers. And what the demon was saying there, that there was an extremely large number of demons within this man.

And the thing that we see here is that they are all powerless before Jesus, all of them together. It shows us the immense power and authority of Jesus, something that we need to come to grips with and know and celebrate today.

They could only beg Jesus to send them into a very large herd of pigs feeding nearby on a hillside. And Jesus allowed it. And they rush out of this man into this herd of pigs.

And they stampede into that lake that Jesus had just calmed the night before. Now, I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but how many of you are thinking about the pigs right now?

I think every Bible study I've done on this, people say, what about the pigs? And what about the poor farmers who lost many, many, many months' worth of wages because of it?

[15:05] Why would Jesus allow this to happen? Well, I don't want you to worry too much about the pigs and get sidetracked, but I think we could preach many sermons on it because there's actually a reason for this that teaches us.

They show us the deep significance of what Jesus is doing. The sea is a picture of death and judgment in the Bible.

You can think of the Red Sea and the flood. There is death. There is judgment. And the picture of pigs drowning is a vivid picture of the future of evil.

At Jesus' word, this great gathering of evil spirits are utterly destroyed, and this is exactly what Jesus will do when he comes again in glory.

This is what will happen to all remaining evil, the Bible tells us. And Satan knows this. He knows what awaits him. And his goal is to take others with him to that judgment, just as the demons took the pigs into the sea with them.

[16:11] That's Satan's goal. But what also is shown to us here is the reality of Jesus' power to invade people's lives and to heal and to restore and to recreate.

They show everyone who watched those pigs fly off the cliff into the sea showed them that the spirits had truly left this man.

They had been released from the man. And Jesus had freed this man from the terrible grip of evil forever. And so for Jesus, the healing of this man's heart and his soul, his mind and his body, was far more valuable, far more valuable than any herd of pigs, no matter how big they were.

And that's true for you and me today. God places incredible value on our salvation, on our healing, on his grace coming into our lives at the cost of Jesus dying for us.

And that's why Jesus said, you know, there's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who need no repentance. It is a picture of the value God places on this new life that he gives to us.

[17:28] Well, a picture of that new life comes up in verse 15, and it is a beautiful description. It's a wonderful and great treasure that's described here because in verse 15, the locals all came to Jesus, and here's what they see.

The man who was demon-possessed, the one who had had the legion, he was sitting there. He was clothed, and he was in his right mind.

It's an incredible change because here is this troubled man who was full of storm, and now he is completely at peace. And he's sitting at Jesus' feet to learn from him as a disciple and follower.

He is clothed so that he is relating normally to the other disciples, and he's in his right mind. He's able to discern what is good and what is right and true.

Satan had dehumanized him, but Jesus had restored his humanity forever. What a blessing, what a picture of God's grace. But amazingly, there are two very different responses to Jesus and what he has done to this man and for him.

[18:43] Two responses, completely opposite. The people of the local region were afraid, and it's similar to the fear of the disciples when they see Jesus' power.

And in verse 17, they begged Jesus to depart from their region. Well, this is Satan's power to deceive.

This is the work of Satan. It's his nature. And Jesus teaches us about this in the book of John, chapter 8. He says, And what Jesus is teaching is the way that Satan murders people and kills them spiritually is to lie to people, particularly about Jesus.

And certainly, these people were deceived. They saw the giver of life as a threat to their livelihood. They saw his rule as something that would change the way they had organized their lives.

And they didn't want to have any part of it. And you know, Jesus did what they asked. This is the thing that Jesus does in our world today as well. He honors that request when people reject Jesus.

[20:02] And this is true of our world today. Our culture constantly bombards us with messages that are untrue. And many believe a lie that Jesus is a threat, that he takes away our freedom, and that he will compromise our quality of life.

So many reject Jesus. But the good news here is that there is a second and wonderful response. Look at verse 18.

Right after people beg Jesus to leave, the man who was possessed begs Jesus to take him with him. He begs Jesus to be with him, that he might go with him in the boat and be one of the disciples, one of his followers.

It's a wonderful picture. He is embracing the life and the freedom that Jesus gives by serving him and following him. And this is what Jesus does when he comes into your life and my life as well.

He not only frees us from sin and evil, he releases you into a life of serving and worshiping and following him. And he gives you a heart that begs Jesus to follow him, to serve him, to be with him as well.

[21 : 16] It is the gift of Jesus in our life, the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. But I want you to notice something interesting here, that Jesus doesn't say yes to the man's request.

What he does instead is to send him out as the first missionary to this area. And I think there's something wonderful about this for the people who rejected Jesus because Jesus does not give up on them.

He's not content just to leave them. Instead, he loves them and he sends this marvelous witness to Jesus' grace into their lives. And he says in verse 19 to this man, go home to where those people live.

And that's often the toughest mission field there can be. And he says, tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he had mercy on you. And I love the way the man obeys in verse 20.

He doesn't just go home. He began to proclaim to the whole Decapolis, which is a region of ten cities there. And he doesn't only proclaim about the Lord, he proclaims Jesus as the Lord.

[22 : 25] And he says how much Jesus has done for him. The man did more than Jesus asked of him because Jesus had enlarged his heart.

He was filled with gratitude because he knew what he had been released from. And he knew the gift of this new life in Jesus. And so I want to close by saying what this means for us today.

It means many things. But if you are somebody who feels far away from God, that you are a person or in a place that is far from God, this reading shows us that no matter what storms are within you, no matter how far away you feel from God, Jesus actually seeks you out.

That he lovingly invades our lives. He has authority over all evil. He releases you from sin. He releases you from evil to a new life.

And he calls you to embrace that life. This is the example of this man. And for, if you have been coming to church for a long time, if you've been involved here, you know what Paul said and taught to the church, that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

[23 : 57] And this is something that we are involved in by praying. Praying is the powerful way that we wrestle against the cosmic powers. when we pray for God to provide for our ministries, when we pray for ministries to flourish, when we pray for people that we know in our lives to know Jesus and be transformed by the gospel, when we pray for unity in our church and the strength in our church, and when we pray for God's goodness and truth to come into the darkness of people's lives, we're actually praying for God's kingdom to grow.

And what that means is that we're praying that God, that Jesus himself will bind the strong man, will bind Satan and plunder him and release people from Satan's power.

That's Jesus' ministry and it is the ministry of St. John's and every church that wants to be faithful to the Lord Jesus. And finally, I want to say that this man really challenges us today.

He was possessed by the most overt and powerful evil that there is. And his life points to what's often hidden from us.

John says that the whole world lies, is helpless in the power of the evil one. That's how he put it. The world lies in the power of the evil one.

[25 : 23] But if you believe in Jesus, he has released you from that power. He has brought you from darkness into his glorious light. And he is also beginning that work in people that do not yet believe, in people who seem very resistant to knowing Jesus.

So in that sense, this man's story is each of our stories as well, although not as dramatic. Maybe some of you do have dramatic stories.

But it is a picture of all of our spiritual journeys. stories. This man was deeply aware of the immense power of the free grace and mercy of Jesus.

It was the fundamental reality in his life. Is that the fundamental reality in your life? This man's heart glowed with warmth and thankfulness for God's love.

Do you have that? Do you know that each of us were walking dead spiritually, and Jesus has had mercy on us, and released us from Satan's grip by the forgiveness of our sins?

[26 : 28] Can we tell that to each other and to those outside our church? Can we tell each other how much Jesus has done for us? As Jesus continues to plant the word of God into our lives as we read Mark, let's pray that our hearts will be filled with the glory of Jesus, his love for us, his powerful work in each of our lives.

And may he give us grateful, thankful hearts that want to worship because of what we have received at his hands. And may we say with Paul, to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. We pray together now.

Please kneel. Amen. We ask you, Lord, that during this time we would be encouraged to draw nearer to you.

Help us to give you our attention, to listen to your voice, to become increasingly aware of how much we need you, and to allow you more and more to intervene in our lives, to bring us from a place of rejection and isolation to restoration and a right relationship with Jesus.

[28 : 09] You set us free from our internal storms. You show us the power and authority of Jesus over evil, sin, and death. Everything changes through the grace, love, and new life Jesus brings.

Thank you for the privilege we have in calling you, Father. Forgive us for the times when we are distracted and tempted and resistant and deceived.

Thank you for the value you place on offering new life to us. We want to sit at your feet now, to be with you, and follow and serve you.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We begin by thanking you for this place of worship. We are thankful for our St. John's family.

We thank you for our leadership, for the opportunity to hear your word taught, to sing your praises, and gather as a community. We thank you for what you have said to us today.

[29 : 12] Please now take a moment to reflect on a truth that God has revealed this morning. We pray for the various groups who meet during the week for Bible study, for men's and women's groups, youth groups, and home groups.

We ask that through time with you and your word, we would increase in love, knowledge, depth of insight, and discernment. Father, grant that your word may not return to you void and empty, but that it may accomplish that for which you sent it.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. In light of all that God has given us and all that he is doing in our midst, we have been asked to pray about the financial needs of our church.

We ask God to increase in us a spirit of generosity to make up the shortfall in giving. We pray that God will provide for our ministries and that our financial needs would be met for the end of the year. In words from the Book of Common Prayer, Almighty God, whose loving hand hath given us all that we possess, grant us grace that we may honor thee with our substance and, remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of thy bounty.

[30 : 41] Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. We have been learning how Jesus is not absent in the storms of life. We lift up to you all who have been affected by Superstorm Sandy.

People's lives have been literally turned upside down. Many have lost loved ones. Many have seen their homes destroyed. We pray that, like the disciples, they would see you bring peace and calm into their circumstances and authority over all that has brought them into harm's way.

We pray for the task of clearing up, restoring, and rebuilding, and thank you that you care deeply for all. Lord, in your mercy, hear a prayer.

We continue praying for those in need. O God, our Father, we ask you to bless and help Derek, Rowena, Marguerite, Glenn, Nora, Carly, Manuel, Rhoda, and Heather.

There are others known to us who we now bring to you by name. Please give courage and patience, endurance and cheerfulness to bear all weakness and all pain, and give a mind at rest.

[32 : 06] Give to all who attend the sick and needy, skill on their hands, wisdom in their minds, and gentleness and sympathy in their hearts. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for missionaries and for the work of God in various places where they serve. This week, we specifically pray for local workers, Paul Ratsoy with Lighthouse Harbor Ministries, and for Dan and Fran Gao with Seeds of Hope.

We pray for Jeremy Curry serving overseas with YWAM, and for Janine and Philip Lafleur with InterServe in Central Asia. Please strengthen, encourage, and inspire these, your servants, as they

spread your gospel and seek to draw others to Jesus.

We also want to pray for the congregations and ministries of fellow Anic churches, Grace Anglican Church in Mississippi Mills, Ontario, and Church of the Messiah in Ottawa.

We trust that because you have begun a good work in us, you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. And finally, gracious God, you have heard our prayers.

[33 : 18] You know our needs before we ask and our ignorance in asking. Thank you that you will answer our requests as may be best for us. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Amen. Amen. Amen.