

The View from the Other Side



KEY
ISSUES

One evening, after a full day of teaching, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." (Mark 4:35) So, leaving the crowd behind, they got into a boat, pushed off from the Galilean shore and headed across the lake to the region of Gerasenes, an area largely inhabited by Gentiles. Jesus was tired and soon fell asleep on a cushion in the stern. As is often the case in the Sea of Galilee, a storm (a furious squall) came up very suddenly. I'm sure you know the story: the disciples became afraid; in their panic, they woke Jesus; Jesus calmed the storm and rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith.

I had the privilege just before Christmas, of going to Kenya as part of a CBM short term volunteer mission team. Mark Buchanan (Canadian pastor and author of books including *Your God is Too Safe*, *The Holy Wild*, and *Things Unseen*) was another member of the team. Mark led the group in a devotional study each morning. They were incredible sessions. One morning, he used this passage from Mark 4:35-41 to challenge us to think about why God had called each of us "to the other side". Believe me, the slums of Nairobi stand in stark contrast with the comfortable lives each of us live in Canada. Why had God called us "to the other side"?

Now, several months after our return, I am still processing the sights, sounds, emotions and thoughts stirred by this trip to Kenya. It was an incredible experience - abundantly more than I could have asked or imagined. In a sense, it was like a magic carpet ride. For two weeks, we lived and moved in a different dimension which at times was starkly real and at other times, subtly surreal.

I've thought a lot about this passage in Mark. As I meditate on it, it occurs to me that we sometimes are so focused on the obvious surface lesson that we miss the deeper depths. I've always thought about this story as a lesson on

the importance of trusting Jesus and having faith to endure difficulties. But as I step back from the passage and look at it in context, I see another lesson. Here's what I see: the crossing between the region of Galilee and the region of Gerasenes is symbolic of the chasm between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world. Jesus is the bridge between the two Kingdoms and when you are walking with Him, you need not fear no matter what the external circumstances might be.

These days we live in, as Christians, are strange days. We are citizens of two kingdoms. We know our destiny - our inheritance is sealed with the Holy Spirit. The Kingdom of God is present, but not yet complete. If you look back through the 4th chapter of Mark, notice that Jesus has spent the day teaching in parables about the Kingdom of God. In fact, throughout His ministry, this is the central point of His teaching. He says again and again, "the kingdom of God is at hand" and "the kingdom is like...". This evening sail across the Sea of Galilee is an object lesson that is etched in the hearts of the disciples forever. It is a literal "eye opener" for them as they look at Jesus and say "Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!"

What lesson do the disciples learn that day? Perhaps it's as simple as this: the last days will be characterized by turmoil. Don't panic. Jesus is not only the master of the wind and waves, but He has authority over all things.

Interestingly, when they arrive in the region of the Gesarenes, they are met by a man with an evil spirit - actually, he is home to a legion of evil spirits who recognize Jesus as the Son of the Most High God. Jesus commands the demons to leave the man and sends them into a herd of pigs (which the demons then throw over a bank to drown). The man, now free of his tormenters, is in his "right mind" and begs Jesus to allow him to go

with him. Jesus refuses to take him, telling him instead to "go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." Jesus and his disciples get back in the boat to return to Galilee.

The reactions of the people of the Gesarene region to this miracle are mixed. Some are afraid and plead with Jesus to leave their area. Others, when they hear of what has happened, are amazed. Is this not a picture of how the world today responds to the good news of the gospel? As we live as salt and light in this world, according to the ethics of the Kingdom of God rather than the ethics of the kingdom of darkness, some will be afraid and send us away. Others will be amazed.

It seems to me that we are living in the midst of "a furious squall". When we are engaged in mission and ministry, we live in the cross currents between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Darkness. One of the things I will never forget about Nairobi is the traffic and the driving habits of the Kenyans (and Alden and Tracy Crain!). Driving in any of our Canadian cities during rush hour is a piece of cake compared to driving in Nairobi. There are very few traffic lights - only traffic circles - and no one ever comes to a complete stop. Alden described the few lights as "go when you can lights". Unless you've been there, you can't imagine how terrifying it was. It still amazes me that we were able to talk and laugh and even relax as we were transported from place to place. For me it has become a metaphor for life in and on the threshold of the Kingdom of God.

As Jesus was in control in the midst of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, so is He in control in the midst of the social and political storms of 21st century Canadian society. He calls us to follow Him as His disciples. He never said it would be easy or dry or comfortable or safe.

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