

Lesson 25: Luke 8:22-39
 “Authority over Natural and Super-Natural Worlds”
 May 17, 2009

Pre-Intro

Before we get to our passage in Luke, I would like to take a moment to focus our attention on the week of prayer which starts next Sunday, May 24.

Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 5:

13"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

14"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

At the heart of this week of prayer is this idea that we are called to be salt and light in our world. We are praying for our ability to truly be salt and light in the 6 different spheres of influence outlined in this prayer booklet. There are 2 rooms set aside for prayer – the prayer room, designed to be a place of confession and communion; and the Fireside Lounge, where six stations will be set up like the example in the foyer with physical reminders to help you focus your thoughts on the prayer...

Introduction

Often when we are planning the service we write at the very top of the order of service ‘Call to Worship’. As we approach our text in Luke today, we come upon 2 stories which by their very nature call us to worship God simply by means of the picture of Jesus that they present. With this in mind I would like for us to prepare our hearts to hear the Word of the Lord in such a way that we would be truly drawn to respond with adoration, with wonder, with a sense of awe for the reality of who this Person Jesus really is.

I invite you to open your Bibles to Luke 8. Before we read, let us pause before the Lord as we approach His Word together...

22One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. 23As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

24The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. 25"Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

“Who is this?!” This is the question raised by both of our stories. Who is this Jesus? He is presented to us as Someone similar to us in some ways (He gets tired and needs to sleep) and yet absolutely unique in others.

This is a question that demands a response. We have noted before that Luke presents a picture of Jesus that does not allow us to remain neutral about the reality of who He is and what He does. We cannot pay attention to this Jesus and simply say, ‘that’s nice’, and walk away unchanged. The characters surrounding Jesus in our stories today represent for us the 2 options that lie before us. In both stories we see that the observers of Jesus are gripped by fear as Jesus does His work before them. In some of them, this fear leads to amazement, wonder, worship, faith and obedience; in others it leads to rejection; to asking Jesus to go away; to leave our territory; to not get so close.

As we observe Jesus in these pictures before us; as we ask the question, “Who is this?” we too are put in a position where we must respond in some fashion. The reality of this Jesus as presented in these stories ought to grip us with fear at some level. I am afraid that sometimes the very familiarity of these stories dulls our senses to what is actually presented to us! Beyond fear, we will choose to either respond in worship, adoration and obedience or else we will say, ‘not now Jesus’, I’m not prepared to accept the kind of work you want to do in my life; give me some space to live my own life.

A fellow by the name of Robert Karris has written an article¹ where he introduces us to a fascinating character from the 13th century named St. Bonaventure. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1217-74), was a bible scholar, a teacher and a writer. He was also the General Minister of the Franciscan Order in which he served. He was a contemporary of St. Thomas Aquinas, a name which is somewhat more familiar to us.

¹ Karris, Robert J. “Bonaventure and Talbert on Luke 8:26-39: Christology, discipleship, and evangelization” *Source: Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 28 no 1 Spr 2001, p 57-66.

Among his published works is a lengthy commentary on the Gospel of Luke. Robert Karris has done the hard work of studying and translating Bonaventure's work on these 2 stories and summarizes his thoughts in this way. Pay particular attention to 3 pairs of words which will form something of a structure for our observation of these stories.

“In his own way, then, Bonaventure shows that Jesus has universal power because he has authority over material and spiritual creation, with Jews and Gentiles, and on sea and on land.”

Jesus shows His authority over the physical world, with the Jews (His disciples) on the sea

Let us make some observations about this miracle on the sea.

I wonder if you have ever been in a situation where you felt at risk on the ocean in a boat of some kind. Probably the closest I've come is traveling on the small ferries that run from Powell River to Comox and back. While we may not have experienced this sensation personally, I think we all know about the power of the sea and can imagine the kind of terror that must have been running through the minds of the disciples as the Sea of Galilee began to whip up a storm

I've never been to the Sea of Galilee but I am told by reliable sources that the topography of the lake is such that it is very prone to sudden squalls and storms that can be quite violent.

And so as the picture unfolds, we imagine the disciples moving into the place in increasing panic as the wind whips and the waves begin to break over the gunnels of their boat. Some of them are frantically bailing water; others are pulling madly on the oars trying to keep pointed into the wind. The severity of the storm must have been extreme as we guess from the text that at least some of these disciples were seasoned fishermen – even they seem to share the same fear and panic. Jesus... well, He is asleep, seemingly oblivious to pending catastrophe. Finally it comes to a point where they can stand it no more and they cry out, “Master, Master, we are going to drown!”

Luke, with his characteristic skill with words, understates the drama of what takes place by simply saying ‘*He got up, rebuked the wind; the storm subsided and all was calm.*’

Try to imagine in your mind the silence that followed. We can hear the noise of the storm – the wind whipping across the water causing their loose fitting clothing to snap like flags on a flagpole; the waves crashing the side of the boat; grown men yelling orders to one another and crying out in fear. And then

suddenly, silence. Quiet... In the silence, fear. From deep within their souls the question begins to surface, 'who in the world is this!??'

Let us remember that these were Jewish men in the boat. Think back with me to some other 'sea stories' from the Old Testament. Probably the most famous is the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Who is it in that story who commands the sea to do behave unexpectedly? It is Yahweh; God almighty. We think of the story of Jonah. Who is it that causes the storm to subside when Jonah is thrown into the brink? It is Yahweh; God almighty.

In earlier stories in Luke, where Jesus has brashly pronounced someone's sins forgiven, the question raised has always been 'who can forgive sin but God alone?' Here the unspoken question is, 'who can command the seas and the wind except God alone?'

Luke is thus once again presenting us with a picture of Jesus that we cannot simply ignore. Jesus possesses authority in the physical realm that demands a response. The disciples respond with fear and amazement / wonder.

Jesus shows His authority over the spiritual creation among the Gentiles on the land.

Come with me as we observe our 2nd story.

26They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. 27When 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. 28When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" 29For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

30Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. 31And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

32A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. 33When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

34When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, 35and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 36Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. 37Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

38The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39"Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Here we have one of a number of stories of Jesus interacting with the spirit world. The message here as in every other story involving demons is very clear – the demons know who Jesus is; they fear Him; He has absolute authority over them.

The whole topic of the spirit world is something which we tend not to think or talk about in our safe, materialistic Western society. C.S. Lewis, in the preface to his famous writing ‘The Screwtape Letters’ makes this observation:

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”²

It is not our mandate right now to explore this deep, complicated, mysterious and yet important area of Christian faith but let us be sure to observe 2 realities about the spirit world from this story.

1. When invited and/or allowed demons are able to influence people and in extreme cases such as this one, actually take full control of their lives.
 - a. Paul clearly tells us in Ephesians that our struggle in this world is not against flesh and blood but against ‘*the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*’ (Eph. 6:12)
 - b. As followers of Jesus we need to have a healthy awareness of the reality of the spirit world and be actively putting on the armour of God as Paul goes on to describe.
2. The 2nd and more important observation for our purposes today is to note that in fact Jesus has absolute and complete authority over the spirit world.
 - a. The drama that unfolds in this story leaves no room for ambiguity – the demons which had been tormenting this poor man recognize Jesus immediately and beg Him for mercy.

² C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, (London: Fontana Books, 1955), 9.

- b. This again is yet another indication that this man Jesus is unique and different from any other human person who has ever lived.
- c. It is, in fact, somewhat ironic that the demons in this story have the confident and immediate answer to the ‘who is this’ question: “*Jesus, Son of the Most High God*” (28).

Ways to Respond

We now turn to consider some of the ways in which the people around Jesus during these incidents responded to Him and then reflect a little on how we can or should respond to the amazing reality of Jesus who holds absolute and very real authority over the physical creation and the spiritual creation.

We have already noted that the characters in both stories respond with fear. The Scriptures repeatedly call us to ‘fear God’. I don’t believe this means we should live in a state of terror as we think of God, but it does mean that we have a deep and healthy reverential fear because we remind ourselves regularly about the awesome greatness of our God. He is all powerful; He is holy; He is the Creator of the Universe – let us never diminish Him in our minds to become someone we can manage! For some of them it was a fear that led to amazement and wonder, while for other it was an overwhelming fear that led to them asking Jesus to leave their district.

1. Fear leading to rejection

- a. Let’s take a look at this latter response first. Look at verse 34-37:
 - i. *34When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, 35and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 36Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. 37Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.*
- b. A number of commentators have suggested different words to describe the kind of fear these people felt and they have also speculated as to the real reason for their fear.
- c. What I want to simply notice just now is that this was a fear which led to them not wanting Jesus to be near them anymore and so they ask Him to leave. This is one of the saddest statements in all of Luke to this point.
 - i. Here is Jesus, the One who has come from God to bring the Good News of the Kingdom of God; now He is in the region of the Gentiles and they turn Him away.
- d. My prayer is that our response to Jesus would not be one that pushes Him away...

2. Fear leading to Amazement / Wonder

- a. Worship – stand in awe of His mighty power and authority
 - i. In the description of the response of the disciples in the boat in our first story the word accompanying ‘fear’ is ‘amazement’ which may also be translated ‘wonder’.
 - ii. If you have no other reaction to this reminder of the authority and power of Jesus, I pray that you will be drawn in your heart to worship this God who is SO great.
- b. Faith – He is absolutely worthy of your trust
 - i. It is striking to note Jesus response to the disciples after they awoke Him and He had calmed the storm. He simply says ‘where is your faith?’ We don’t know exactly the tone of voice Jesus might have used, but we do know that Jesus expected them to have faith = He expected that by now they should have been able to trust Him for absolutely everything.
 1. How could they have acquired this faith? By looking back and observing Jesus...
 2. After all, they have observed Him healing many kinds of diseases; they’d seen him raise someone back from the dead; they had heard Him teach with authority about the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Jesus says to them, *‘after all you’ve seen, shouldn’t you have been able to trust Me, even in the middle of this terrible storm?’*
 - ii. Jesus invites us to respond to Him in faith today as well.
 1. Perhaps it is not stretching the story too much to use the storm as an analogy and ask, ‘is there a storm in your life right now that is causing fear and anxiety to rise up within you?’ How will you find the strength to trust in the goodness of God in these times? By looking back at these stories and absorbing the wonderful picture of Jesus who holds all power and authority and yet is so loving and gentle. You also find faith by looking back at how God has been faithful to you in past times in your life.
 2. I know that there are a number of us in this very congregation who are going through very uncertain times.
 - a. I do not claim to have found the complete answer to this question of how to have faith in trials, but I do know that I have become much more aware of God’s goodness and faithfulness in the past and that

this does in fact help to give confidence when looking at an uncertain future.

- b. In fact I would go as far as to say that the storms actually help us to find that faith where in other times we wouldn't pay so much attention to the reality of this Jesus...
- c. Sit at His feet = learn from Him
 - i. Here we move back into our 2nd story and read the description of our dear friend who has been delivered from the power of the demons – he is now seen sitting at the feet of Jesus.
 - ii. This language is used frequently in Scripture and always describes the picture of a student or a disciple learning at the feet of His teacher.
 - iii. And so we too must be challenged by this picture of this one so recently cleansed, now sitting and learning at Jesus feet. Do we respond to these wonderful pictures of Jesus with an eager desire to learn more? How will that get lived out? By spending time in the Word? By signing up for a course that will lead us deeper into our understanding of God?
- d. Talk about Him = spread the news
 - i. The end of our 2nd story is a touching scene.
 1. *38The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39"Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.*
 - ii. This man's response to his encounter with Jesus was that he couldn't stop talking about what Jesus had done for Him.
 - iii. I would submit to you that if we really were able to grab a hold of the reality of the picture of Jesus that these 2 stories represent, we too would be unable to help ourselves when it comes to speaking about Him to our friends, our workmates, our family...

Conclusion

In these 2 stories we see that *Jesus has universal power because he has authority over material and spiritual creation, with Jews and Gentiles, and on sea and on land.* Let us raise our voices to respond in worship to this One who is so great!