

A while back Malcolm asked me if I would like to do a testimony. I had it on my heart to share a story that I heard when I was 10 or maybe younger. That story was all about sharing.

As I sat writing some notes for my talk I kept thinking about the story of Jesus calming the storm. It also popped up during our morning readings. When I researched my notes it cropped up there as well. Someone was trying to tell me something!

And I thought - hang on what has this got to do with sharing??? So I read the passage and realised that the calming of the sea was just the beginning of a story. It's setting the background for a story about sharing.

Mark 4:35-41

Jesus and his apostles got in a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee. It was evening time. Jesus had decided to visit the area of Gerasenes. This was not a Jewish area but was home to the Gentiles.

He had decided to go by boat to avoid the crowds that had been following him. Maybe for some time out or maybe for some bonding with the apostles.

The Sea of Galilee is an inland sea. At its widest point it is 7 miles across. It is an area that is renowned for freak weather. Strong winds and rough seas can come out of nowhere. Even though some of the apostles were experienced sailors it was one of these storms that caught them out.

In Jesus' day, Jewish people feared large bodies of water. They referred to the sea as an abyss and saw it as a symbol of chaos and hell.

Although the Sea of Galilee often looked beautiful and calm, many biblical writers described it as an abyss, a fearsome place of darkness and chaos.

In those days few could swim, and even fisherman avoided deep water.

When Jesus told the apostles they were going by boat they followed him, unquestioningly, with total faith in him. The boat they were in was open to the elements. There were no cabins and little if any shelter as such. In rough water they would have had to bail out water. In a storm or heavy rain they would have been soaked through.

So half way across they run into a storm. In Marks gospel there is reference to other boats. These would have been fishermen who knew the waters well and if there had been an inkling of a storm they would not have set sail.

This is not just any old storm but a really bad one. And they were scared. They thought they were going to drown. They were busy bailing out water, trying to steer the boat and keep it upright. And at some point in all this they think of Jesus. He could save them. But where was he? What was he doing? He was asleep!!! How could he possibly sleep through all this??

Now I can relate to this last bit really well. Some years ago my wife and I went to England on a ferry. On our return we arrived at the dock for an overnight crossing. It was dark, it was raining hard. It was windy. Sound familiar?? There was a sign that said Danger! Gale force 8. And in my heart I thought oh no we can't sail in that. But oh yes we were. We boarded and set out to find some seats for the journey. We landed up in an area near a bar/restaurant. My wife was tired and decided to stretch out on the floor. She made a pillow out of her coat and closed her eyes. Meanwhile I am in the seat gripping the handles. When the boat wasn't going up and down it was going left to right. I could hear plates and glasses sliding across a counter top and smashing. I am not a lover of sea crossings at the best of times and I sitting there think let me off I don't like this. And I asked god to get us to dry land safely. How could my wife possibly sleep through this? She will tell you "simple. Just close your eyes". And this I guess is what Jesus did.

After the apostles woke Jesus he did what only God could do. He calmed the waters and wind. In fact we read that Jesus rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace, be still." The only other times thus far in Mark's gospel when Jesus has rebuked or said "be still or silent" was when Jesus was talking to demons. In **Mark 1:25**, Jesus says to the unclean spirit, "Be silent, and come out of him!" It is the same Greek word used here when Jesus says to the sea, "Be still."

Jesus was in fact rebuking the Satanic in this storm. And we should bear in mind that the twelve had been given the authority to cast out demons and could have taken care of

this storm themselves, but they failed to recognize that this storm was more than a storm. The fact that Jesus did not respond straight away to the storm indicates that perhaps he was testing their faith.

By calming this demonic storm he proved to the apostles that he wasn't just a man – he was much much more. Eventually in the early hours of the morning, they landed on a shore in an area called Decapolis. Now Deco is Greek for 10 and polis means cities. It was an area of 10 cities or large towns that were each independently governed.

Mark 5:1-13

Can you imagine what his disciples experienced to through to get up to this point? They have experience a storm that they thought would kill them. They witnessed Jesus do something that no man could do. They are pulling their boat up on to the shore. It's getting dark. There's a small crowd there waiting to greet Jesus. No doubt they were thinking why are we here? Why have we come to this place? And then a crazy guy comes running down the shore toward Jesus shouting at the top of his voice. And the locals were no doubt edging away from this person as he was well known to them.

What do we know about this person? We are told he was possessed. There is no mention of how this happened or why.

He was cast out of society and forced to live in the caves/tombs amongst the corpses.

The demons in him had given him great strength.

The local townsfolk were concerned for his safety and no doubt their own as well.

They tried to keep him chained up so he could not harm himself or others. Remember there were no hospitals. No drugs that could be given to sedate him. And this was all they could do to look after him.

We are told he cut himself with sharp stones. He broke the chains. He was naked, possibly unwashed, smelly, not someone you would socialise with. And he has been this way for a number of years.

He sees Jesus and runs to him. Falls at his feet and greets him. For some reason, and it mention elsewhere in other cases of casting out demons that the demons can't help themselves in Jesus' presence. They have a compulsion to speak his name.

Jesus takes pity on him and tries to cast out the demons. But these are powerful. He commands them to come out. But they don't and there is a standoff. Next Jesus asks the demons its name. It was a widely held belief at that time that if you used the demons name you took control over it. But it was having none of it. It told Jesus I am legion for we are many. The reference to Legion actually means two things. Firstly it was saying that it was as strong as a Roman army; secondly it was saying it was as large as a roman legion. Typically a roman legion would have comprised of 3500 to 6000 men. Next they try and barter with Jesus. Asking not to be tortured. To be able to take possession of another living thing rather than be sent back to where thay came from.

Jesus finally accepts this request. And casts them out into a heard of pigs. Why the pigs? In the old testament the Jews

were told that pork was unclean. SO hearing this story they would probably have thought well serves them right they landed up in an unclean animal. But Jesus taught that all foods were clean. So why the pigs? Jesus had left the Jewish west side of Galilee and had gone to the non Jewish east side so really this wasn't an issue. But perhaps he put the man above the value of a pig? A man's life to Jesus was worth far more to him than that of a herd of pigs. And they would have had a value.

Now when I read this passage previously I imagined a herd of pigs to be 10, 20 maybe 40. No we are told in Mark's gospel that it was a herd of 2000 pigs. The demons entered the pigs and pigs were having none of this. Rather than be possessed they threw themselves over a cliff into the water where the demons perished.

Just imagine if you will. You are going for a stroll along the beach. You look across at the cliffs and you see 2000 pigs hurling themselves into the sea below. There is a crowd of people nearby so you wander over to find out what is happening. Only to discover that Jesus is behind it all.

The crowd is not pleased with Jesus. Why? He had changed things. This was a person that they had been used to. They knew his ways. He was a part of their lives and not everyone likes change. Also.....Well those pigs would have been their livelihood. They might have owned maybe one, maybe several; those without much money might have had a share in a pig. The people weren't going, "Oh, the poor little piggies...they're going, "My money!!! My life!!! I'm ruined!" And although there were some that were in awe of Jesus' power over the demons the majority were angry and filled

with fear and they asked/demanded that Jesus should leave. This is to me the saddest bit in the bible. It was the only time in the bible that Jesus was asked to go. And he did.

Going back to the crazy guy. There he is. Just five minutes ago he was saved and he is now clothed. Where did the clothes come from? Were there some spare clothes in the boat? Probably not. Did Jesus tell someone to give him some clothes? Not that we are told. It is far more likely that Jesus gave him his own robe to put round him. He loved this man so much that he not only saved him but he even gave him the shirt off his back.

Before Jesus leaves some of the crowd ask to go with him. The man who has been saved also asks. Jesus radically transformed the life of this man and his response seems so good! He's like, now that I'm healed, now that my life is different, I want to go with you Jesus! Let me please go with you!

But Jesus says no.

At this point in Jesus' ministry, he hasn't sent out the apostles to do any kind of ministry yet. They aren't ready to go out on their own.

But Jesus sends this man back home to share his testimony.

Say hello to the very first missionary to the gentiles. He was told to go out and tell his story of what Jesus did for him. And this he did because the next time Jesus came back to this area there were crowds who had brought the sick and afflicted to Jesus to be cured.

Let's just for a minute think of what would happen these days. Nowadays, we'd put this guy through 5-10 years of counselling. We'd make sure he goes through all the discipleship groups and the training groups, and he would have to prove himself before we let him do even half of what Jesus told him to do.

"No, you can't come with me." He says, "I want you to go and tell your people everything I've done for you."

This guy hadn't been through Bible school. He's had no proper training.

Do you know what he did have?

He had a story of one encounter with Jesus.

That was it.

He had just one story. That was the only tool that Jesus gave him.

He went out and he shared, probably with everyone that he can meet - the story of how Jesus set him free.

So what can we take away from this story? There are 3 things:

Jesus is more powerful than the forces of darkness.

Jesus can change your life. He can certainly mess with your life and it will never be the same once he does.

Lastly, Jesus has given you a testimony to use.

So, if that guy could go and reach ten cities, what could you as a congregation do?

If you have one story of an encounter with Jesus, you can use it.

It might take you 15 seconds to share your Jesus story with someone.

If you have more time than that, you can take more time, right?

So in conclusion we don't have to be trained, go to Bible College, go on a training course, or be someone really special to spread the word. We just need to go out and do it. I would like you to Share your stories.

**Grant, O Lord,
that what has been said with our lips we may
believe in our hearts,
and that what we believe in our hearts we may
practice in our lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**