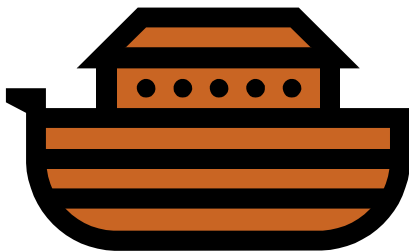


Re-imagining Life



Session 7: *Can things Really change?*

This chapter presents us with Jesus being involved in a wide range of situations. In each of them, people had been robbed of hope, or were facing potentially catastrophic crises. For each of the people, there seemed to be no way that their situations would be able to change. It seems as though Luke is allowing the readers to see the very worst situations that are imaginable. The challenge revolves around how Jesus will respond. Yet in each encounter, Jesus is in control. Because of who he is, he is able to change the situations so that order and renewal are possible. For each of the individuals concerned, he restores them to full humanity again, but with the hugely significant additional awareness that to be fully human means to be fully aware of God's love and concern. These people then go and tell others the stories of what has happened. That is hardly a surprise – we all would tell that story, wouldn't we?

Gospel stories like these pose a challenge to Christians today. We do not seem to see miracles like these; if we hear about them, they always seem to have happened somewhere else. So is it that we are hopeless Christians, with insufficient faith to see these things happen? Well, maybe ... or not. The better question might be to think about why Luke includes the stories in his gospel – his announcement about Jesus. What does he want us to know about Jesus? How would the early church have read these stories?

They certainly would have inspired hope, meaning and mission. The Christians knew that the death and the resurrection of Jesus had vindicated his message and his work. How do we live with the awareness of that?

In the next chapter, we read that the disciples are sent out on their mission. They had seen Jesus do these things, they had been his apprentices, now it was their turn.

We are also sent out in our everyday lives. What story do we tell? What have we experienced in our lives and in the lives of friends that persuade them that things can change? What is the news of hope that we carry?

Luke 8

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.

Notice

As you read, notice these features:

This miracle comes in the midst of the miracles of power – Jesus stilling a storm, healing a centurion's servant, healing an 'unclean' woman and raising a young girl from the dead. They all point to the power of Jesus over the extremes of life.

The Gerasenes is away from the normal place where Jesus worked.

This area, thought to be mainly Gentile, would be why the town had pigs as part of its industry.

This man showed all the signs of madness. He is an extreme example of someone who has been torn apart by destructive forces.

A Legion consisted of 6000 soldiers. This points to the degree of disintegration that this man was experiencing.

Note that the evil spirits ask permission from Jesus. There is a clear comment here on Jesus' authority.

Note the use of the word 'afraid'. The townspeople were willing to deal with things when the man was dangerous, but when he is healed they are 'afraid'!

Reflect

Can you imagine this man? What would he have looked like?

What story would he have told after this event?

What picture of Jesus do you get here?

What are the situations that we feel are beyond our control, and yet we have learnt to live with them?

What examples are you aware of where people or situations have really changed? Does this give you hope for other situations? How and where should we tell these stories?

This man becomes fully human again. This restoration of full humanity is one of the effects of Jesus' ministry. How have you seen that working out in your own life or in those around you? How can you live and work in such a way that would bring good news to people around you?

The next chapter begins with Jesus sending his

disciples out on mission. They have watched him do the works of power. Now it is their turn. How does that make you feel?



Word for the Week

Learning from Jesus – total immersion

a woman... came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. Luke 8.44

There is a story of a doctor who worked devotedly among leprosy patients for many years. Every day, he would greet them, 'Good morning, my brothers and sisters'. What an affirmation of worth this must have been to those whose biological families, and whole society, had ostracised them. But one day his greeting changed, and they heard these doom-laden words, 'Good morning, my fellow lepers'. His identification with his patients was complete.

Jesus' incarnation was a similar kind of identification. Laying aside his divine majesty, he took on mortal flesh, and entered human society. 'Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity', wrote the author of Hebrews.

But Jesus did more even than that. As he went about, he identified himself not only with human nature but also with uncleanness, sin and death. When the desperate woman, suffering from incurable bleeding, reached out and touched his robe, Jesus could have ignored her. But in acknowledging her touch he was, according to the Levitical law, making himself ritually unclean. On other occasions, he took the initiative, as when he touched a man with leprosy and the dead body of a widow's only son. And ultimately 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"' (Gal.3:13).

How far such actions set Jesus apart from the gods of other religions! I hope that it is not irreverent to say that I would find it hard to believe in a loving God if it wasn't for Jesus.

Jesus' self-abasement is, however, far more than an argument for our view of God. It gives us deep assurance of Jesus' love for individuals – for you and me, for thug and granny, for prostitute and pimp, for president and pop star. Far more intimately than any human friend or relation, Jesus knows, understands and loves us, and wants to help us to become what he created us to be.

But we can also learn from Jesus to regard and treat people – all people – with the same passionate empathy and self-giving love.

Helen Parry