

8-24-25

Jesus Among the Crowds

Mark 5: 21 – 43

Okay, I admit it. I took my family to Disney World. If memory serves, we made that trip during the 2019 Thanksgiving break just before Covid hit. As a matter of fact, most of us came down with some sort of illness on the return trip. I don't think it was Covid, but who can be sure?

Visiting Disney World over Thanksgiving break probably wasn't the best idea I've ever come up with. The crowds were incalculable!

You could not take one step without having to move left or right to avoid bumping into someone else, which I did anyway. It was the perfect environment for spreading a global pandemic. But we weren't worried. We were focused on getting to the next show, ironically called the Carousel of Progress!

Overall, we had a great time except for the part where we lost Calem who at that time was about 5 years old!

It was getting close to the end of the day when the entire crowd was maneuvering to get in a good position to view the fireworks display which they regularly schedule just before the park closes. So, it was getting pretty dark.

Well, in our attempt to reposition ourselves away from trees and overhangs that would hinder our sight, Calem vanished. He was right beside me, and then, just like that, he was gone!

To be honest, It was one of the worst feelings I had ever felt. Here I was, swallowed up in a mass of humanity, unable to move, and I just

misplaced our little boy! Getting struck by lightning would have felt better than the panic I was feeling right at that moment.

Fortunately, it was short-lived, and Calem is with us today. We found him maybe about 50 feet away by himself, mesmerized by some distraction, completely unaware that he had even gone missing!

Jesus often found himself in the midst of a crowd, didn't he?

More accurately, he was the reason **for** the crowd.

Even in the very early days of his public ministry, people started congregating around him. Obviously, this had to do with what he was teaching and doing.

Mark makes the comment in 1: 27 – 28 that *“the people were all so amazed that they asked each other, ‘What is this? A new teaching - and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits, and they obey him.’ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.”*

In the same chapter we also read that **the whole town gathered** at Simon and Andrew's home and *“Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons.”*

Are you detecting a trend?

I don't know what the population of Capernaum was when Jesus visited, but a whole town showing up at single residence certainly constitutes a crowd in my book.

Still in chapter 1, Mark records that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly, because as soon as his presence was detected, people would flock to him. So, he stayed out in the lonely places.

But still the crowds came.

So, whether it was beside the lake, a tax collector's home, or on a hillside, the people could not get enough of Jesus, his teachings, his healing, and his performing of miracles.

But crowds of people aren't the only thing with which Jesus had to contend. There were other crowds, and we learn about them in Mark chapter 5.

As a matter of fact, I count at least four other crowds that Jesus encountered in chapter 5 alone besides the needy, desperate human crowds that were always jockeying for position to be close to him – and we see this most noticeably in the text that was just read this morning:

Verse 21: *“A large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake.”*

And verse 24: *“a large crowd followed and pressed around him.”*

Presumably, this is the same crowd that was with him at the lake. They just decided to follow him to the bait and tackle shop which kind of puts a new spin on the little saying we sometimes see at lake cabins: “Relax, you're now on lake time.”

Relaxing was not possible for Jesus. Lake or no lake.

But what are the other crowds you're referring to, Pastor?

I don't see any.

Well, how about the crowd of dead people in the cemetery?

I suppose we tend to overlook them because they're below our view – they're beneath us. (Sorry about that, I couldn't resist.)

No, we overlook this crowd because our attention is immediately drawn to this poor tortured soul who Mark introduces us to at the beginning of chapter 5: *“They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. The man lived in the tombs.”*

So, the man came out of his abode to greet Jesus. Can you imagine the conversation? Sorry, Jesus, I can't invite you in, my house is a disaster!

So, here's a crowd that Jesus encountered. A crowd of death. But he didn't come across this scene haphazardly nor accidentally. This meeting was planned all long. Remember what he said to his disciples before that big storm hit on the Sea of Galilee? *“Let us go to the other side.”*

Yes, he's referring to the other side of the lake, but perhaps he's also referring to the kingdom he is in the process of invading. Jesus' mission all along has been to invade the kingdom of demons and demise, darkness and death.

If Jesus' kingdom is the kingdom of God and heaven and light and eternal life – and we know that it is because this is what Jesus calls his kingdom on numerous occasions like when he says, “the kingdom of heaven is like this or that, and then he gives an analogy or a parable.

Then what he is teaching is that the kingdom of darkness and death and evil is the enemy and is in absolute conflict with God's kingdom - completely incompatible with God's kingdom and must be invaded, destroyed, dismantled, and rendered completely powerless.

And this is exactly what Jesus is doing when he goes to the other side of the lake to the Gerasenes and to this cemetery that this tortured man calls home – a place crowded and littered with death and despair.

By Jesus going there, He is displaying his dominance and dominion over death – and this is just the beginning!

Second, Jesus confronts a crowd of demons. Specifically, the crowd of demons who are tormenting this poor man: *"Jesus asked him, 'what is your name?' 'My name is Legion, he replied, for we are many.'"*

Now, on a quick side note: The Garesenes is probably best described as the region directly east of the Jordan River primarily comprised of a dozen or so Greek / Hellenistic cities that are loosely bound together for political and economic reasons.

In other words, this region is mostly populated with Greeks, Romans and non-Jews and there is no small history of conflict between the Jewish people and these Gentiles.

So, when Jesus enters the region of the Garasenes, it's not an exaggeration to say that he is entering the enemy's territory.

So, Jesus invades by asking the man his name, and surprisingly – or maybe not - the demons speaks.

Perhaps Mark mentions this to demonstrate just how serious the man's spiritual and physical condition is. By the way, a Roman legion is comprised of 6,000 soldiers – a fair - sized crowd to say the least.

The point in all this is to say that after Jesus learns of the man's horrible condition – that countless evil spirits have taken up residence within him and are doing incomprehensible harm, Jesus says enough is enough and commands them to leave:

“Come out of this man, you evil spirit!”

And that's exactly what they did. They immediately left the man and entered a nearby herd of pigs causing them to run headlong down the bank and into the lake where they drowned.

All of this was done under the supervision and authority of God – truly a full-on display of Jesus's power and supremacy over both the physical and spiritual worlds.

Are you now beginning to see the different crowds that are at play?

Crowds of lifeless people in a cemetery that one person calls home.

Crowds of demons holed up in a man tormenting and destroying his life.

A crowd of pigs - innocent bystanders that become the unfortunate collateral damage of one of Jesus' miracles.

They're all there for us to contemplate and assess.

The thing I think we need to understand about the evil spirits entering herd of swine is that Jesus was not having compassion on the evil spirits by allowing them to enter the pigs.

What that event symbolizes, at least from my point of view, is the future judgement and coming destruction of the Evil One. I refer you to Revelation 20:10 which says, *“And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur ... They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”*

It's ironic that the evil spirits begged Jesus to not torment them – the very thing they were doing to that poor homeless man.

But what's even more surprising is the towns people response to the healing miracle Jesus just performed! It turns out they were more concerned by the financial lost they just incurred than the miracle that just saved one of their own! So much so, that they *“pleaded with Jesus to leave their region”!*

But should we be surprised?

This is exactly what unbelief gets you – a distorted view of reality and a miscalculation of what is truly important in life.

Yes, the people just suffered a serious economic setback, but a man, probably a member of their own family was given back his life and was restored in body, mind and soul and given hope again! But all they can think about is the bacon they won't be able to sell at tomorrow's farmer's market.

Fear and unbelief can twist and distort reality so much that we can't distinguish up from down. We no longer know what to live for anymore. This coincides with what Matthew wrote in 9:36: *“When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*

Were they harassing each other? Perhaps. But more significantly they were being spiritually harassed by the evil one, his minions and his lies that bring darkness, despair, and death.

How are we to survive?

Well, my answer may seem terribly trite, but it still comes down to faith – not any faith, but the type of faith that recognizes and pursues God no matter how bleak, dismal, and hopeless things look.

Take for example Jairus, the synagogue leader and the woman who has been suffering from severe bleeding for as long as Jairus' daughter had been alive. They both braved the bustling and chaotic crowd in order to beseech God's unmerited favor.

One does it openly and unapologetically, but still with sincere humility, readily admitting that no amount of religious observance or pious activity can ever restore his precious daughter's health.

The other covertly – almost invisibly, but still with great humility, confessing that any past hope she may have placed in remedies or doctors has turned out to be nothing more than unrealized dreams.

Both come with a faith that refuses to buy into the crowd's ignorance of their own life's situation or the distorted perception they have of Christ himself.

And this is why, I believe, Mark mentions these two people – two people who probably had nothing in common with each other except that they had faith in Jesus. He purposely tells their stories immediately after the miracle of the healing of the demon-possessed man and the town's remarkable response of unbelief to highlight such stark differences.

How will you believe in Christ?

Will you believe in Christ, even if someday you have to call a cemetery your home?

Will you continue to believe in Christ even you feel the presence of evil sliding up beside you, ready to hinder and torment your growth in Christ?

Will you believe Christ in the face of economic ruin or will you plead with Jesus to leave your region?

Will you listen to your associates who try to tell you, "Why bother the teacher? Your situation is hopeless.

Will you finally give up on Jesus when you receive another medical prognosis that determines there's no cure for your condition? (I'm not saying you'll ever get cured from your condition in this life. I'm just asking ... can you hold to Christ until his promise to make everything new finally comes true?

Jesus commanded all the evil spirits to leave, and they obeyed.

He also sent out all the doubters and scorners and laughers out of the house before he raised that little girl back to life.

Faith in Christ is a special kind of faith because it is a faith that only God gives.

It hopes, It's humble, it's vulnerable and honest, it obeys, it refuses to buy into the crowd's misperception of God. Instead, it rejoices in God's kingdom.

And ultimately, it lives. Amen.