

THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

May 1, 2016

1. Healing at the Mountainside

Matthew 8:1-4

Jesus had just concluded His Sermon on the Mount, and as He was coming down with His followers, He met a man with leprosy at the mountainside requesting healing from Him. This healing at the mountainside began His early ministry in area around the Sea (Lake) of Galilee. The crowd which has been listening to the Sermon on the Mount along with the disciples was still following Jesus.

Leprosy was a common ailment in ancient world, and Israel had encountered it throughout its history. It was a dreaded illness, although Biblical leprosy is not the same as modern day leprosy (Hansen's disease). In the Bible the word leprosy refers to a variety of skin ailments, some serious and some not – but all rendered its sufferer unclean. This is similar to anyone living in sin, usually declared unclean. Hence the issue of leprosy has much to do with ritual uncleanness as great danger to health or imminent death. A person declared a leper was considered dead just like anyone in sin is dead – for the wages of sin is death. Leprosy was so serious a problem that the Mosaic Law addressed the condition of the leper and the process of being cured from the dreaded illness in Leviticus Chapters 13-14. This leper was outside the city and met Jesus by the mountainside as the Mosaic Laws in Leviticus did not permit lepers to live in the city with others but to live in isolation outside the cities because leprosy was contagious. The leper can only return to the city and into the society when he is cleansed.

Hence our text of the day reads, “When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. 2 A man with leprosy [The Greek word traditionally translated leprosy was used for various diseases affecting the skin] came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. 4 Then Jesus said to him, “See that you don’t tell anyone. But go; show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them” (Matthew 8:1-4).

Life consists of mountaintop and valley experiences. Each time you have a mountaintop experience you can almost always expect to meet some situation(s) at the valley below that require resolution. For instance, when some disciples had a wonderful mountaintop experience at the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, they met a man that complained that he brought his sick son to the rest of the disciples and they had failed to heal him. In today's text, after the mountaintop experience of listening to the Sermon on the Mount (the greatest Sermon any one could preach), the crowd and Jesus met a leper on the mountainside who was requesting healing or restoration from leprosy. When such unsurmountable problems are resolved, miracles occur. Today's text teaches us about the process through which a miracle can occur and that the process involves request, response, resolution, and restriction and/or responsibility.

1. Request

A miracle is ripe and would happen when an individual in a circumstance, condition or situation is humble enough to make a request for help according to God's will. When you feel you have

been isolated because of your circumstance, condition, or situation there is need to look up to God, humble yourself and request a miracle from God. Sin is a prime condition that can isolate us; sin separates us from God and God's people. Our text in verse 2 states, "A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean"". His posture of kneeling indicate humility and then he requested according to God's will – "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean". The only prayer not answered is the one not asked according to God's will!

2. Response

A request made in humility and according to God's will is always met with positive response. Our text in verse 3a states: "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!""

3. Resolution

The leper's problem was resolved instantly because he had requested according to God's will. The text in verse 3b confirmed that "Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy".

4. Restriction and/or Responsibility

However, Jesus gave this leper restrictions and/or responsibilities to the leper cleansed. In verse 4 the text say, "Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them"". Here we see Jesus heals this man and instructs him not to tell anyone about his healing but to do as the Law of Moses commanded regarding the cleansing from leprosy. Jesus' instruction not to tell anyone about the cleansing is in line with His desire not to be followed because of sensationalism but to be real. Jesus simply does not wish to be followed because of mistaken understandings of His messianic role. Secondly, Jesus instruction for the leper to show himself to the priest as proof (or a witness) is interesting. This proof was in keeping with the Jewish legal requirements for a cleansed leper's return to society. This is to demonstrate that Jesus supported the Jewish Law. Recalled He did not come to abolish the laws but to fulfill them! That is why He came to meet the requirement for the penalty of sin: The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus our Lord. A sinner who comes to Jesus must not immediately start telling everyone indiscriminately. First the sinner must report to a minister so that he can be instructed appropriately as to how to share their testimony and to be assured of their deliverance from sin into a newness of life in Christ Jesus. For anyone who is in Christ is a new creature, the old things have pass away and behold all things have become new. This new life must be evidenced by the transformation that has taken place. It is the priest or the minister of the Gospel or pastor that can certainly do so.

Mt Traveler members, as we conclude today, the following are some main points to remember: The early Ministry of Jesus around the Sea of Galilee after the Sermon on the Mount reflected the following:

- The Healing of a Leper – a miracle occurring and the process involves request, response, resolution, and restriction and/or responsibility.
- And let the church say, "Amen!"

Do you know this Jesus who transforms you through cleansing and/or healing to be accepted by the society of believers? If you have not, we invite you to come, repent, and humbly accept Jesus Christ into your heart and life by faith. I hope you will make room in your heart for Him today!

Then confess with your mouth your faith in Him that He died and rose again to save you from your sin through the shedding of His blood on Calvary, and you will be saved and become part of God's family and kingdom. Then ask Him in prayers to empower you through the Holy Spirit with wisdom, courage and boldness to be always truthful to cause the continual growth of God's kingdom as you practice the Beatitudes. May God bless you as you humbly open your heart to provide room for Him as the choir leads us in a song!

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Mt. Traveler Missionary Baptist Church, Waverly, Alabama
Synopsis of Sermon Preached by Rev. B. C. Datiri, Pastor

THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

May 8, 2016

2. Healings at Capernaum

Matthew 8:5-17

On this Mother's Day 2016, I am wishing you a happy and pleasant day! Jesus cares about mothers. Part of Jesus' earthly ministry involved healing the sick. During His early ministry, a lot of cleansing, healing and miracles were experienced to authenticate who He said He really was and those healed was for the purpose of serving Him. In Capernaum, which became the headquarters of His earthly ministry, many people were healed by Jesus. In fact, no-one ever healed liked Jesus - before or ever since. The same Jesus is alive today! He hasn't changed. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrew 13:8). If that is the case someone may ask, "Why doesn't our compassionate Savior restore the sick in mind and body as during His earthly ministry?" The right responses could be:

(a) Miracles are rare events because they involve the suspension of the natural laws governing the universe. If miracles were commonplace the universe would become unpredictable and the principle of cause and effect would no longer apply.

(b) Jesus' ministry on earth was for a relatively very short time and He was given the power to perform miracles to establish His credentials. Remember for 30 years Jesus performed no miracle even though He was compassionate. Jesus was given the power and freedom to perform wonders in order to convince men and women of his special status as the Son of God. This is what He said to his critics: "Even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father" (John 10:38).

(c) Jesus no longer has to establish his credentials. God did that when he raised him from the dead. The Holy Spirit has now been given to bear witness to Jesus.

(d) If Jesus still healed the sick in great numbers men and women would come to him for the wrong reason. They would lose sight of why the Great Physician came to earth. The main reason for his remit was to save men and women from their sin. Jesus does not promise to extend our lives on earth but to give us life after death - if we believe on him.

Therefore to prove his credentials as the Son of God who has come to redeem man, Jesus

performed a great deal of miracles including healing during His ministry on earth. Hence our text of the day reads, "When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly." 7 Jesus said to him, "Shall I come and heal him?" 8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment. 14 When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. 15 He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. 16 When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases" [Isaiah 53:4 (see Septuagint)]" (Matthew 8:5-17).

These verses teach us that the Lord God is not satisfied with only saving the soul as He really cares about the human body. When a centurion came to him to heal his servant, Christ willingly healed the servant with His Word. When Saint Peter's mother-in-law lay on her deathbed, Christ drove away the fever. He did not turn away from the multitudes that were demon-possessed or afflicted with all kinds of diseases, the deaf and mute and blind and maimed but He healed all of them with His almighty power.

Do we have less of a Christ today than they did? Certainly not! We have the same Son of God. The same almighty Word is spoken in our midst. Why then do we not have the same kinds of miraculous healings that happened when Christ walked in Galilee? Yes, we do have those healings, only they are not so obvious. If the people of God pray for healing, and the doctors are able to help someone recover, we know that the healing really was from God, even though it was performed through an earthly doctor. We know that it was in response to our prayer, just as surely as Christ answered the Centurion's need. Moreover, Christ did not come only to bring a healing here and a miracle there. He came to bring a full complete healing of every sickness for all time - He came to bring healing to every part of you: mind, body as well as soul and spirit. Your physical flesh is full of sin as much as your sinful heart. In fact the effects of sin can be traced in each illness you suffer, each broken bone or sniffing nose or weakness of any kind. The purpose for Christ's coming was to erase these physical burdens that all men deserve. He came to carry your burdens, including sickness. The Son of Man had no need to suffer from any disease. Yet He submitted Himself to life's troubles, sickness included. He suffered every kind of ailment you have felt. However, He also died and rose again to heal the human condition. Only by striking the cause of all sicknesses could He destroy them all. The death He died destroyed death, just as the suffering He felt on Calvary destroyed suffering. His death has purchased for you by His lifeblood a disease-free existence and a life uninterrupted by pain, sorrow and weakness.

This perfect life is already your possession now, even though you must wait a little while for its complete fulfillment. On that day, Christ the Great Physician will meet you and tell you, "As you

believe, so shall it be done for you." Then your faith will make you well for all time, since the One whom you believe in is the best Healer of all times. He has already spoken His healing Word to you, and He is speaking it now. Like the centurion, you know that Christ is the Lord who only needs to speak the Word, and it is done because it is your faith that brings it to existence. Likewise, Christ has placed the soothing, cool water of life upon you that cures the deadly fever of sin so you can serve Him and others as Peter's Mother in-law did. He has cast away the demons from you that would have dragged you down into hellfire with them so that you can follow and serve Him.

Today, Christ is both the Doctor and the Medicine. For Christ healed you even from the worst disease of all: sin death itself. On the Cross, He died and cured death as He rose again from death on the third day. Because he rose from death, you will certainly rise someday in a body that is incorruptible and immortal just like His glorious body. With this perspective it is much easier to endure the suffering of this present world when you know that they are only temporary. The illnesses that cling to your flesh are only the remnants of the symptoms that hang on to you, even though the cure is yours already, even now. Death itself, which seems such a terrible ogre, is only a hollow shell with no sting and no permanency. Death is the beginning of joy, for death itself is conquered. Death is a servant of the saints, to bring you into the unveiled presence of your beloved Lord. The key thing is to hold onto your faith in Christ Jesus. For as you believe, so shall it be done for you. If you believe that Christ the Lord has saved you from sin, death, and every torment of body and soul, then it is so for you. If you believe that He has given you eternal life and every blessing through His Blood, then it is so for you. May God preserve you in this faith, until what you believe has been done for you in the final fulfillment in the glorious Kingdom of God forever and ever! Amen!!

Mt Traveler members, as we conclude today, the following are some main points to remember: The early Ministry of Jesus around the Sea of Galilee after the Sermon on the Mount reflected the following:

- The Healing of a Leper – a miracle occurring and the process involves request, response, resolution, and restriction and/or responsibility.
- The Healings at Capernaum – Showing Christ is interested in our complete deliverance - sin, sickness and death so that we can serve Him and others.
- And let the church say, "Amen!"

Do you know this Jesus who transforms you through cleansing and/or healing to be accepted by the society of believers? If you have not, we invite you to come, repent, and humbly accept Jesus Christ into your heart and life by faith. I hope you will make room in your heart for Him today! Then confess with your mouth your faith in Him that He died and rose again to save you from your sin through the shedding of His blood on Calvary, and you will be saved and become part of God's family and kingdom. Then ask Him in prayers to empower you through the Holy Spirit with wisdom, courage and boldness to be always truthful to cause the continual growth of God's kingdom as you practice the Beatitudes. May God bless you as you humbly open your heart to provide room for Him as the choir leads us in a song!

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THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

May 15, 2016

3. The Cost of Following Christ

Matthew 8:18-22

Following Jesus Christ is good but it comes with a price tag. King David expressed this explicitly when he said that it was not worth worshipping God if it cost him nothing (I Chronicles 21:24 – “But King David said to Ornan, “No, but I will surely buy it for the full price; for I will not take what is yours for the LORD, or offer a burnt offering which costs me nothing”). True worship in following Jesus would cost you something. Do not be deceived to think that following Jesus is all about receiving benefits. Certainly there are benefits in following Jesus but there is always a price tag to it as well. Because of all the miracles that Jesus performed during this early ministry in Galilee, many followed Jesus impulsively not understanding the price tag that comes with it. Others were reluctant followers of Jesus Christ for fear of leaving their comfort zones. All the same there was a great crowd that followed Him.

Therefore our text of the day reads, “When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. 19 Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” 20 Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” 21 Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” 22 But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”” (Matthew 8:18-22).

These verses teach us that the Lord wants us to understand that even though there are true followers in the crowd that follow Jesus, there are impulsive as well as reluctant followers also. First let us begin with the impulsive follower, who promises to follow Jesus without fully understanding the full cost of discipleship. The scribe or teacher of the law was such an impulsive follower. The scribe promises to follow Jesus wherever He goes, not realizing the true nature of the radical call to discipleship. This radical call to discipleship means leaving all, including family, friends, home and its comfort without fully knowing where to abide. To the teacher of the law who spontaneously said I will follow you wherever you go without giving a thought about the ramifications Jesus said, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head”.

Secondly, there was the follower who was reluctant to give up their comfort zone but Jesus asked him to follow Him. The would-be disciple is a reluctant follower who likewise does not understand the commitment demanded by discipleship. This reluctant follower always has excuses as to why they cannot make a commitment to follow Jesus right away. Listen to what the text says, “Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” 22 But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead””. If removed from the Jewish setting, this saying of Jesus is difficult to understand, but left in the Jewish context it has considerable meaning. The context is the Nazarite vow of Numbers 6:6-8 (“Throughout the period of their dedication to the Lord, the Nazirite must not go near a dead body. 7 Even if their own father or mother or brother or sister dies, they must not make themselves ceremonially unclean on account of them, because the symbol of their dedication to God is on their head. 8 Throughout the period of their dedication, they are consecrated to the Lord”) and the priestly service of Leviticus 21:11 (“He must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not

make himself unclean, even for his father or mother”). In both cases, touching a dead body resulted in ceremonial uncleanness. Both called for a radical dedication and sanctification. Discipleship of Jesus calls for the same sanctification from the world and dedication to service as Kingdom service is total commitment to Jesus. Therefore we cannot afford to be impulsive or reluctant followers or disciples of Jesus the Christ.

The take home message is that this section dramatizes the dedication demanded by Messianic discipleship. The full force of the radical call to discipleship must be set in the context of Jesus’ own disciples and the reaction of the Jewish leaders to Jesus, and then in the context of Matthews community and their settlement in a new and hostile Gentile community. However, even today, the call to discipleship must be accompanied by a willingness to make a radical change in lifestyle. Following Jesus still demands a willingness to leave everything including our “comfort zones and boats” and follow Jesus. Therefore the impulsive follower must count the costs and the reluctant follower must forsake their comfort zone and follow Jesus with a full commitment. This is the word of God for the people God. And let God’s people say, Amen!!

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- And let the church say, “Amen!”

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THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

May 22, 2016

4. The Winds and the Waves Obey Him!

Matthew 8:23-27

An approaching storm is a scary thing to face. Each time we receive an alert or warning of an approaching storm whether a thunderstorm, hurricane, tornado or winter snow blizzard fear grips our hearts and we are thrown into a panic because of the unforeseen danger that comes with such storms. The topography of the land also can add to the intensity and danger of the storm making it more ferocious. As such people naturally are scare to death because of the impending and inclement storms. Stores are usually cleared of food, water and other necessary resources to sustain life. However, it is kind of absurd to find one just sleeping in the storm. People would think of anyone sleeping during a fierce storm as a weird person. I slept through Hurricane Opal (with winds up to 75 mph) that passed through Alabama, October 4, 1995; and my family was furious with me because they were scared to death by the storm while I sleeping very deeply. When Jonah was fleeing from the Lord he was found sleeping in the storm that he caused. Jesus and His disciples were also caught in a furious storm during His early ministry in Galilee as they were crossing the Sea of Galilee; yet Jesus was sleeping soundly in the storm.

Therefore our text of the day reads, “Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” 26 He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. 27 The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” (Matthew 8:23-27).

These verses teach us that the Lord wants us to understand that the miracles of calming the great storm on the Sea of Galilee is a lesson on faith and/or the need for faith in seemly impossible situations. In fact at this point in time the disciples were still struggling to understand the full nature and power of Jesus and as such they were struggling with their faith in Him as His disciples. This section of the scripture also speaks definitely on the nature of discipleship because it requires deep faith even in the face of impossible and/or unbelievable circumstances, conditions and/or situations to know that all will be alright.

You must understand that the Sea of Galilee is surrounded by hills and is susceptible to sudden and violent storms. Matthew in verse 24 indicates that “Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat” implying the sea was extremely rough and dangerous suddenly. Therefore the disciples’ frantic reaction was natural and their expressed fears were profound. But Jesus was sleeping. So the disciples went and woke him, saying “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” In other word, Lord don’t you care that we are perishing while you are just calmly sleeping? He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. Jesus’ response and His reference to little faith pick on one of Matthew’s theme: people of little faith who should have great faith. Jesus reference to the disciples’ fear in such manner is found five times in Matthew (6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:18 and 17:20) and is well translated “O men of little faith” in the Revised Standard Version or “you of little faith” in the New International Version.

The disciples marveled that Jesus calm the Sea at His word of command and asked a rhetorical question, “What kind of man is this that even the winds and the waves obey him?” The answer is obvious – this man is not an ordinary man, because only God can command the waves and the sea and they obey the command. Certainly Jesus and His disciples would have been familiar, and Matthew’s community would have known the following psalms that indicated that the sea and

the waves obey the commands of God: “Who is like you, Lord God Almighty? You, Lord, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them” (Psalm 89:8-9) and “You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations” (Psalm 65:5-7).

The take home message from this section is that Christ is Lord over everything and therefore the winds and the waves of the storms of this life obey His commands. But do you as His disciples have little faith in Him whereas you ought to be men of great faith? Our old folks understood fully well who was Lord over the storms of this life when they often say, “trouble don’t last long” – implying that the storm is usually but just for season afterwards sunshine returns again. And with Christ in your vessel or boat, you can always smile at the storm and have no need to worry because He has authority to calm the storm at any moment. Only have faith in Him because at the word of His commands, the storms are calmed and peace is restored! Therefore, Christians why worry in fear when you can pray or call to the One who calms the storms of this life at His word of command. But you must pray in faith and according to His will and your peace will be restored. Hence with strong faith in the One who has authority over storms, you can rest at peace in your storms and sleep while the storms are raging without losing any sleep because of fear.

Finally I am reminded of a ferocious storm that overtook the disciples one Thursday in Jerusalem when Christ was arrested. Fear gripped their hearts and they all went into hiding for fear even as Christ was marched from one judgment hall to the other. On Friday He crucified Jesus and all their hopes was lost because He died. He was buried in a borrowed tomb, but early Sunday morning He got up with all powers in His hands so that anyone who has faith in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. Do you know Him? Is He you Lord and savior? Is He alright? Then there is no need to worry but seek you first His Kingdom and its righteousness and all these other things will be added to you. This is the word of God for the people God. And let God’s people say, Amen!!

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- There is a price tag in following Jesus that you cannot afford to be impulsive or reluctant but dedicated in your commitment to follow Jesus.
- The storms are calmed at the word of His command and peace is restored!
- And let the church say, “Amen!”

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THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

May 29, 2016

5. The Restoring of Two Demon-Possessed Men

Matthew 8:28-34

Demons are falling angels that are evil spirits and rebellious beings towards God. Demons possess people who open opportunity for them to do so. Demons cannot possess or inhabit the righteous but the unrighteous. Once demon possessed, people act very wicked, ugly, crazy and rebellious causing others to be afraid of them. Demon possession was a common phenomenon during the days of Jesus ministry on earth as it is today too, except now we attempt to explain such as psychiatric problems (psychosis, psychopath, bipolar) as they affect the mind. Demonic influence can cause both mental and physical illness for instance a boy was suicidal because of a demon (Matthew 17:15-18), a man was both dumb and blind due to a demon (Matthew 12:22), a woman was physically deformed by a "spirit" I believe is a demon (Luke 13:11-12) and the demon possessed men of today's text who lived in the graveyard or tombs (Matthew 8:28-34). Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee to seek and save those demoniacs in today's text so that they can be restored to their right minds. And each time that Jesus is about to restore demoniacs there would always be "storms" to deter such from happening because it is spiritual warfare. Jesus knew about the demoniacs on the other side of the Sea of Galilee before He asked His disciples to cross it with Him. Then the furious storm we discussed last week occurred. Demons will always cause storms of lives especially when they know the transformation of God is about to do in the lives of those possessed by them. Demons are spirits and so they are supernatural and can cause natural and spiritual disasters. They also know Jesus who is supernatural and has power over them. And certainly, Jesus has authority over the natural storms and the supernatural beings because He created them all. Jesus also has ALL powers in His hands and will pass judgment over all He had created including the demons.

Therefore our text of the day reads, "28 When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, [Some manuscripts Gergesenes; other manuscripts Gerasenes] two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. 29 "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" 30 Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. 31 The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." 32 He said to them, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. 33 Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. 34 Then the

whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.” (Matthew 8:28-34).

A critical observation is Matthew’s account here that includes two men, whereas Mark’s account (Mark 5:1-20) and Luke’s account (Luke 8:26-39) of the same event include only one man. I personally believe there could have been more demonic-possessed individuals in the region of the Gaderenes. Moreover, because of Matthew’s predilection (or preference) for truth to be established by two witnesses, he included two men rather than one of them in his writing since his gospel was directed towards the Jews who believed likewise. In another event Mark (Mark 10:46-52) described one blind man, whereas Matthew (Matthew 20:29-34) describes two.

Our text tells us that these demonized men were coming out of the tombs meaning they were so mentally deranged by the demons that they were actually living in a graveyard to match their condition – defiled and unclean. Matthew tells us that they were so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road anymore. The people in the area were afraid of these demon-possessed men, and with good reason. Mark and Luke only talk about one of these demonized men and described him in more detail telling about his great strength. Mark 5:3-4 says, “no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him.” They had tried to capture this man and end his attacks on people in the area, but he proved too strong for the chains they used to bind him with.

Mark and Luke also describe some of his mental derangement. Luke says that “he had not put on any clothing for a long time,” and Mark says, “And constantly night and day, among the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out and gashing himself with stones.” The demons residing within him manifested themselves by causing him to be deranged, masochistic (liking and inviting misery), and have superhuman strength. As Jesus and the disciples are going by the graveyard, these demonized men come out of the tombs and come before Jesus crying out (vs. 29) “What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” It was not the men so much as the demons inside speaking like that. The men did not know that Jesus was the Son of God, but the demons did know. Demons are fallen angels and spirit beings, and as such they recognized Jesus’ spirit though they had not encountered Him in human flesh before. Mark and Luke indicate that one of the men even fell down before Jesus as they speak with Him. Demons are rebellious spirits, yet they have no choice but to fall down and obey Jesus even as Philippians 2:10 tells us that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess, it is only a matter of timing. These demons not only recognized Jesus, they also knew that they were going to be judged by Him.

Demons have better theology than some preachers. James tells us that they believe there is one God and they shudder because of it. Here we find these demons wondering what Jesus was going to do with them. Luke 8:31 tells us specifically that they were afraid that Jesus was going to cast them into the abyss as other demons had been (1 Peter 3:19) before the start of the millennium when Satan and his entire host will be cast in (Revelation 20:2f). Did Jesus come to torment them before the time?

At this point, the demons begin to entreat Jesus not to cast them into the abyss (Luke 8:31) or to

send them to another country (Mark 5:10). Matthew 8:30 tells us that they notice a herd of swine feeding a distance away and in verse 31 “the demons began to entreat Him, saying, ‘If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.’” This is not the “if you decide to cast us out” because that was already clear. Mark 5:8 tells us Jesus had already ordered them out. Here they are entreating Jesus about where they were to go. It is not really an “if you cast us out,” but more of a “since you are casting us out, can we go to the swine?” Nothing in this text, or in Mark or in Luke, indicate why the demons wanted to go into the herd of pigs except they saw this as a better option than being cast into the abyss. It is safe to assume that they knew Jesus would not grant them going into some other person, so possibly they thought Jesus would accept this option since they were unclean and the swine were also considered unclean by Jewish law. We do know from both Mark and Luke that there were many demons, even calling themselves by the name, “Legion, for we are many.” We also know from Mark there were about 2,000 pigs in that herd. These men had many demons in them, and now that they were about to be cast out of the men, they request Jesus to let them go into the swine.

Matthew 8:32 records that Jesus grants their request by simply commanding them, “Be gone!” “And they came out, and went into the swine, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters.” Demons were fallen angels and spirit who rebelled against God, but like captured enemy soldiers, they had no choice but to obey Jesus when in His presence, because He is God. There has been quite a bit of speculation about why Jesus may have granted the request of the demons. Some have said it was to punish the owners of the swine because pigs were unclean by Jewish law, therefore they should not have been raising them. But that makes the assumption that the owners were Jewish whereas Jesus was in an area with a lot of Gentiles. The texts do not really say why Jesus granted the request of the demons, but they do record the result of what happened, and that tells us the response of the people of the city.

Matthew 8:33 indicates “And the herdsmen ran away, and went to the city, and reported everything, including the incident of the demoniacs. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they entreated Him to depart from their region.” Mark and Luke both tell us that when these townspeople arrived and saw Jesus they also saw the former naked demoniac sitting down, clothed, and in his right mind. They also saw the report about the swine was true and they realized what Jesus had done. He had cast the multitudes of demons from the man. This Jesus was no ordinary man, and as it says in Luke 8:37, “they were gripped with a great fear.” That is why they asked Jesus to leave their region. Some have speculated that they wanted Jesus to leave because they valued their swine more than the demonized men. They feared losing more of their livestock if Jesus would cast more demons out of other people. That could be true, but none of the texts stress that. Instead, they emphasize that they were afraid because they saw that these men who had been demoniacs were now normal, and the testimony of the herdsmen and the evidence of the drowned pigs was that Jesus had indeed cast the demons out of these men. They were afraid of Jesus and His power. This was not an ordinary human, and it scared them. The response of the people of the city to Jesus was fear. They did not want to know anymore about Him. They had seen enough to know He was not an ordinary man, and they wanted nothing more to do with Him. They asked Jesus to leave. And Mark and Luke tell us Jesus complied.

Mark and Luke also tell us about the response of the man who had been indwelt by the thousands of demons. Mark 5:18, “And as he was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was entreating Him that he might accompany Him. And He did not let him, but

He said to him, “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone marveled.” The man who had been indwelt by the thousands of demons knew what had been done for him and who had done it. His response was that he wanted to follow Jesus. But Jesus had other plans for the man. The people of the city would not tolerate Jesus’ presence, so God in his mercy to that city and that whole area was going to leave a witness to them – the former demonized man. “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” The man’s response was obedience. He went and did just what Jesus had told him. The result was that the whole region of Decapolis, that whole area to the east and to the south of the Sea of Galilee, heard about Jesus and what He had done.

In conclusions I must say the demons, the people of the area, and the demoniacs had to face the question of “who is Jesus?” Today we have to face this same question too. Matthew has further strengthened his case that Jesus is God in human flesh as He has authority over disease, nature, and over the supernatural. How do you answer that question? Who is Jesus?. What is your response? Are you going to be like the demons? Knowing who Jesus is does not bring a benefit in this life or in eternity if that knowledge is like that of the demons. The demons knew who Jesus was and they trembled because they knew He was their judge. They were rebellious and yet obeyed Him only when they had no other choice. Do you recognize who Jesus is, but the response of your life is still in a state of rebellion? Do you obey only when you are left without any other choice? If that is the characteristic of your life, then be warned you are in grave danger of being cast out just like the demons. Are you like the people of the city? They were curious about Jesus, but became afraid when they found out Jesus was not like them. They were scared that if Jesus could change the life of a demon-controlled man, then He might change their lives as well. Let me be frank, if you like your life the way it is now in rebellion to Christ, then you have good reason to be frightened of Jesus.

The good news is that He loves you too much to let you stay the way you are. He wants to cleanse you from all sin, and not just the outward things, but the hidden sins of the heart as well. He wants to bring sinners to repentance and salvation, and those who are saved into a closer walk with Him in a life of holiness. Are you afraid of what Jesus will do to your life? Then be warned that if you send Him away, He will leave behind a witness of Himself, but He will go. Are you willing to risk that? What Jesus wants are people like the demonic. Jesus came to earth in order to seek and save the lost, to redeem sinful man. His death, burial, and resurrection were all done so that Jesus could transfer you from the kingdom of darkness into His kingdom. If you come to Jesus and confess your sins, He will forgive you and cleanse you just as He did the demoniac. The response He desires from you in return is the response of the demoniac, “I want to follow you,” and a willingness to go and do whatever He says. The Scriptures tells of many things that He wants us to do in following Him including being good stewards of all that He has given to us, using our gifts to build His church, reaching out to those that are lost, and for us to live holy lives. If He tells you to “go home and tell all your people the great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you” will you do it enthusiastically? Who do you think Jesus is? What do you think you should do in response to Him? He is God. I pray your response will be one of trust and obedience. This is the word of God for the people God; let God’s people say, Amen!!

Mt Traveler members, as we conclude today, the following are some main points to remember: The early Ministry of Jesus around the Sea of Galilee after the Sermon on the Mount reflected the following:

- **The Healing of a Leper – a miracle occurring and the process involves request, response, resolution, and restriction and/or responsibility.**
- **The Healings at Capernaum – Showing Christ is interested in our complete deliverance - sin, sickness and death so that we can serve Him and others.**
- **There is a price tag in following Jesus that you cannot afford to be impulsive or reluctant but dedicated in your commitment to follow Jesus.**
- **The storms are calmed at the word of His command and peace is restored!**
- **Two demon-possessed men were restored!**
- **And let the church say, “Amen!”**

Do you know this Jesus who transforms you through cleansing and/or healing to be accepted by the society of believers? If you have not, we invite you to come, repent, and humbly accept Jesus Christ into your heart and life by faith. I hope you will make room in your heart for Him today! Then confess with your mouth your faith in Him that He died and rose again to save you from your sin through the shedding of His blood on Calvary, and you will be saved and become part of God’s family and kingdom. Then ask Him in prayers to empower you through the Holy Spirit with wisdom, courage and boldness to be always truthful to cause the continual growth of God’s kingdom as you practice the Beatitudes. May God bless you as you humbly open your heart to provide room for Him as the choir leads us in a song!

If you are reading this on the Internet why don’t you pray asking Jesus Christ to be your Lord and savior, then write us at pastordatiri@mttraveler.org? If you are a child of God and this message has blessed or helped to you, please write and tell us also.