

Have you ever accepted an invitation to go somewhere with someone and found yourself having second thoughts? That happened to me when I was asked to accompany a small team to Irian Jaya to deliver 300 New Testaments in the Ketengban language... Everything about that trip reminded me that **our greatest blessings are often found on the backside of our greatest fears.** Following Jesus will inevitably lead us to people and places outside of our comfort zone. We started this series with Jesus' invitation to Matthew, "Follow me." We end the series by contemplating just how far following Jesus will take us. Jesus was not only a life-giver and a life coach but He was also a life-launcher - sending out the disciples to be missional viral agents everywhere they went, even to people and places outside of their comfort zone.

1. As we follow Jesus He takes us farther and farther from the shore... Mk. 4:35-38

When Jesus sent His disciples out He told them, "Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; ⁶ but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." **Matthew 10:5-6.** Sounds a little exclusive doesn't it? "I thought Jesus came for all people." He did, but this statement is viewed as a second chance for Israel to fulfill their original calling to be missional viral agents on this planet. God chose Abraham and His descendants to spread the glory of His name all over the earth but Israel lost sight of her calling. God's chosen people got entangled with false gods, went into exile, and failed in their mission. Jesus came and called them back to that mission. In this passage, He is demonstrating to His Jewish disciples that they are to fulfill their calling to take the message "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." They are to take the message beyond their own people to unfamiliar places where there are unfamiliar (and unfriendly) people. That is their calling. For an observant Jew going to the "other side" was a frightening prospect. The other side was where the Gentiles lived. How do we know? There are two clues in this passage; one is the mention of Decapolis (5:20), ten pagan Roman cities inhabited by Gentiles on the other side of the Jordan. The second clue is the fact that there were pigs on the other side (5:11). Pigs are considered unclean. No Jew ever wanted to come in contact with pigs. Jesus deliberately took His disciples into hostile territory. He still does.

There is a huge gulf between where we sit today and where most of you will be tomorrow. You will leave the relative safety of people who believe like you do and be deposited in a place populated by people who do not share your views. Unfortunately many of us retreat from that world. It is safer to stay on this side of the lake and shout across, "Hey, you should be over here. You'll go to hell over there." But Jesus leads His disciples right into the heart of pagan territory.

I love that poster that shows a sailing ship surrounded by ice bergs. The caption reads, "A ship is safe in the harbor...but that is not what ships were made for." Jesus didn't save us and give us abundant life so we could see how many blessings we could accumulate for ourselves. Jesus gave us life so we could give it away. Every week we gather to celebrate who Jesus is and what He has done. When we leave this place we take the life of Christ with us into the market place. We have been called to take the message "to all nations." This calls for intentionality and sacrifice because we naturally want to stay close to home and be with people who are like us. Jesus will not allow this of His disciples. How do we overcome the fear of "the other side?"

2. As we follow Jesus the fear of His presence becomes greater than the fear of life's storms...
Mk. 4:39-41

When Jesus stilled the storm the disciples suddenly realized there is a power in the universe more powerful than any of the things we humans worry about. Cancer, job loss, bankruptcy, the loss of a child or a spouse, even dying, these are not the worse things that can happen to a person. To be effective ambassadors for Jesus we have got to be convinced that there are worse things than dying like living without purpose or dying without a legacy. Our respect for the power and purpose of God has to overshadow our respect for any of the things that frighten us.

When Jesus commissioned the disciples he told them not to fear man but fear God. "It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear *whispered* in *your* ear, proclaim upon the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Matthew 10:25-28. In other words, the antidote to fear is fear.

Success in the Kingdom of God is achieved not by human effort or human cleverness but by simple faith in His commands, by simply doing what He says to do and trusting that He is stronger than any obstacles we may face. We must be convinced that the safest place in the universe is in the center of God's will. The challenge for most of us is that we never get to "the other side" because the storm turns us back. We have high hopes and great faith until the some storm comes into our lives dwarfing our faith. In that moment we lose sight of the shore and our sole concern is for our own lives. We forget all about where we were going or what our objective was. All we want is to retreat to a place where we can be safe and secure. However, as God gets bigger the storms get smaller.

3. As we follow Jesus we grow in our willingness to take a familiar message to an unfamiliar people...Mk. 5:1-13

I smile when I read this because if I'm one of the disciples I'm thinking, "Lord, could we start out a little slower, like having a VBS for Gentile children and then maybe we could work our way up gradually to super-human, screaming, slashing demon-possessed tomb dwellers?"

4. As we follow Jesus we expect resistance to our message...Mk. 5:14-17

You would expect that all those who saw the miracle Jesus performed to be impressed and fall at His feet. But they realized that the transformation Jesus brings can be bad for business. "If He keeps casting out demons we aren't going to have any pigs left." They are more concerned with their business interests than with the restoration of a human life.

When Paul preached in Ephesus the same thing happened. Acts 19 records there occurred, "no small disturbance" because of Demetrius the silversmith who was bringing in "no little business" making silver statues of Artemis. If we let Paul keep preaching the Gospel Artemis will be "de-

throned from her magnificence” (Acts 19:27) not to mention that this preaching is hurting our business.

You can recognize a true revival when the economy is impacted by the impact of the Gospel. In the accounts of the Welsh revival legend has it that the miners became less productive because their mules were not responding to their commands. They no longer shouted the profanities at their mules that the animals were accustomed to.

5. As we follow Jesus we embrace the power and simplicity of the Gospel...Mk. 5:18-20
We preach a Gospel that has changed us in tangible ways. For the Gerasene demoniac the Gospel was not just a subject to be discussed, “it was the power of God to those who believe.” He experienced the freedom that resulted from the power of Jesus over demonic forces. It wasn’t hard to get him to give a pretty convincing testimony, much like those who have been baptized this morning. Their baptism signals a change of direction.

This command in v. 19 is remarkable in light of the many other places where Jesus tells people to keep His identity secret (Mark 1:43; Mark 5:43; Mark 7:36; Mark 8:26). The answer to the dilemma of the “Messianic Secret” is geographical. When Jesus is on the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee, He requires secrecy in light of Herod Antipas’ hatred for Him. The encounter with the demoniac takes place on the Gentile side of the lake and Jesus tells him to, “Go tell everyone what has happened to you.”

There are too many Christians today carrying around a “Messianic Secret.” So here is my challenge: God has called you to be a missional viral agent to spread the news about Him – even to unfamiliar people in unfamiliar places. The best way to start is to start where you are and step outside your comfort zone. You can “go to the other side” right there at work. You can “go to the other side” right there in your neighborhood. Trust God and go to the other side. When you get there do what the Gerasene demoniac did, “He went away and began to proclaim...what great things Jesus had done for him.” (5:20).

We are going to launch the Freeman family this morning...