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### Questions for next Section

- Notice the mention of many boats in 4.36, but then they fade away. What do you think happened to the other boats? Why are they included in the narrative? What do the other boats mean to?
- Notice that in a moment of danger, when the disciples are in need of a miracle, they refer to Jesus as Teacher? Is there a link between Jesus as teacher and his role in this text? Are there broader links between teaching and power?
- What other biblical character/episode does this text seem to build on? What individual finds himself in a similar situation with a slightly different outcome?
- What similarities or contrasts would you draw between that character and what the disciples and Jesus experience?
- In what ways are we called to have faith like Jesus? (Psalms 3.5; 4.8; Proverbs 3.24-25) How does the question of faith for disciples change in the narrative?
- A great storm confronts the disciples but it is overcome by a greater power. How would you make connections between this narrative and 3.27?
- Who is responsible for the storm battering the ship? What clues are offered by Jesus rebuke of the sea and 1.25? What parallels or contrasts would you draw between the disciple situation on the boat and your own?
- Read 5.1-20 and 6.45-52. Look at the role the sea plays. What conclusions do you draw?

### Scriptural Text

4.35 And that day, as the evening was coming, he said to them: "Let's go to the other side." 36 And sending the crowd away, they took him off, when he had gotten back in the boat and the other boats were with him. 37 And a great wind storm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was beginning to fill with water. 38 And he was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. And they awoke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die? 39 And he roused himself and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Shut up! And the wind died down and there was a great calm. 40 And he said to them, "Why are you so cowardly? Don't you have faith yet?" 41 And they feared a great fear and said to each other: Who then is his? For even the wind and the sea obey him!

### Introduction

If the preceding passages have focused on the hidden and revealed nature of the coming kingdom of God, how is this passage linked to those earlier passages?

For Mark, teaching and power are inextricably linked.

**Mark 1.22** They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

**Mark 1.27** They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

The passage of the calming of the seas, in its present form falls in to three parts:

- a stage setting introduction (4.35-36)
- The description of the storm and Jesus’ conquest of it (4.37-39),
- and the interpretative conversation (4.40-41)

After the introduction, the passage is structured around three instances of the word great (*megas*).

- 4.37 a great storm
- 4.39 there was a great calm
- 4.41 they feared a great fear

The repetition of *megas* implies that the disciples are threatened by a devastating superhuman power, but that a greater power comes upon the scene in the person of Jesus, who conquers the sea and inspires overwhelming awe. The message is similar to 3.27, where the strong man’s grip has been broken because a stronger one has come on the scene.

### Going to the other side

The other side is believed to be the predominately Gentile Decapolis region on the far shore of the Sea of Galilee.

- What has this the previous chapters suggested regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the Gentiles?
- How does the Jonah narrative help us?

### The Other Boats

- Who might the other boats represent and who then do the disciples represent?

In its Markan context, the mention of the boats recalls 3.14 where the disciples are called to, “**to be with him**,” and 4.10 in which the circle of disciples was widened to include “those around the twelve”. For Mark those boats may have reference a larger group of disciples that he hints at in 4.10, and an invitation for the reader to place themselves in the midst of this scene.

### Jesus’ conquest of the storm (4.37-39)

The description of the storm also reminds us of the story of Jonah.

Note the similarities between the two narratives:

- Departure by sea
- Violent storm at sea
- A sleeping main character
- Badly frighten sailors
- Miraculous stilling related to the main character
- Marveling response by the sailors

The overlaps between the two narratives are not just relate to the shared themes but also to the common vocabulary shared between the texts.

“We are about to die...”

The greek word from which this phrase is translated appears in the exact form of the LXX of Jonah where it serves as a recurring theme within the book, escape from destruction at the hand of God.

**Jonah 1.6** The captain came and said to him, “What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish.”

**Jonah 1.14** Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, O LORD, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.”

**Jonah 3.9** Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.”

But there are also critical differences between the texts:

- Unlike Jonah, Jesus is not fleeing from God but actively involved in the accomplishment of his will.
- The disciples do not ask Jesus to intercede with God as happens to Jonah (1.6) but call upon him to save them as the distressed sailors of Ps 107.23-30.
- While similar to Jonah, Jesus is also greater than Jonah.

**Matt. 12.41** The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!

### Calming the Sea

Command of the sea is seen in the Old Testament as the prerogative of God alone e.g. (Job 26.11-12; Ps 104.7; Isa 51.9-10) Note his language to the sea. Similar to the language used to deal with the unclean spirit in 1.25. There is a link being drawn between his rebuke of the sea and the earlier exorcisms. If the waves beating on the ship are symbolic of the persecution being experienced by the Markan community, that persecution is now linked to 1.25 to have as its source Satan’s hostility to Jesus’ mission. But, the passage also shows that ultimately Satan’s hostility is of no avail.

### Conclusion (4.40-41)

The passage ends with a dialogue between Jesus and the disciples which reinforces Jesus' identity and the reader's understanding that the disciples are having a hard time grasping that identity. After conquering an external threat, Jesus turns to an internal one - the disciples' unbelief.

Jesus' reprimand of the disciples would resonated with the persecuted Markan community, since the call to not be afraid and to have faith is reminiscent of the language of martyrdom:

**John 14.27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

**2Tim. 1.7** for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

**Rev. 21.8** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

The human challenge to God of, "Why don't you care?" is met with he divine challenge of "Why are you so cowardly?" Both are real questions reflecting two realities. On the one hand the desperate human situation and on the other the divine assurance that all shall be well.

In this passage, trust seems to have two aspects. On the one hand, it is a trust like Jesus', a basic confidence in God's providential care, the sort of trust that Jesus shows by sleeping through the storm. There are several Old Testament texts (e.g.: Psalms 3.5; 4.8, Prov 3.24) in which sleeping peacefully is a sign of trust in the protective power of God.

On the other hand, faith is also trust in Jesus, by the end of the passage the faith (*pistis*) has come to mean a perception of his cosmic stature, and the consequent conviction that nothing bad can ultimately happen to the person who is with him.

John 16.33 I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!"

In the movement from 4.38-4.40, we are moving from faith like him to faith in him. We move from seeing Jesus as an example of faith to seeing him as the object of it.

### Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac Structure

#### Questions of the Text - Mark 5.1-20

- What parallels do you draw between this passage and the parable of 3.27?
- The demon within the man pleads for mercy from Jesus and asks why is Jesus there and has he come to torment the demon. (An ironic question given the

demons torturing of the man.) But why does the demon come to Jesus at all? Why run towards him in stead of running from him?

- Why would the demons seeks to possess the swine? What do you make of the outcome of their possession?
- What do you make of the townspeople's reaction? How do you compare them to the Legion? How might they be linked to parts of the 4th chapter?

**In its current form, the story is a mini-drama consisting of four acts:**

- Jesus initial encounter with the demonized man (5.1-10)
- The transfer of the demons to the pigs (5.11-13)
- The towns people's reaction (5.14-17)
- The man's spreading of the news of the miracle (5.18-20)

**Strong Old Testament Overtones**

**What are the connections between this text and the Exodus passage of the Red Sea crossing?**

**Jesus initial encounter with the demonized man (5.1-10)**

**A man with an unclean spirit - Αντηροπος εν πνευματι ακαθαρτο**

- The key to the phrase in the the use of en, which suggests a more literal understanding might be: the man has been swallowed up by the possessing spirit. The lack of identification of the man only adds to the sense of his lost identity as a result of the demonic bondage.
- This passage presents many links with Jesus first exorcism in chapter 1. It is not be happenstance that the first narrative of his public ministry in a Jewish context and his first narrative of a ministry in a Gentile context are both focused on conquering an unclean spirit.

**Graveyard Setting**

- The graveyard setting and the demoniacs self mutilation suggests that his state reflects a mourning ritual that has gone out of control. The overall impression of the description within this text is of one that is completely out of control and the mercy of destructive outside forces. The picture of human incapacity is driven further by the language of no one being able to control him or power to subdue him. This clause is linguistically and thematically reminiscent of the Strong Man parable of 3.37. The implication is that the possessed man in our passage derives his supernatural strength from the Strong Man, Satan.
- The passage also emphasizes the magnitude and malevolence of the force working against the man. Not the destructiveness of the satanic power. The effect that theses conditions would have on the man. Finally, note the irony: the

world's method of dealing with those whom Satan has chained is to tie them up further.

### **What is your name?**

- Legion. The demon employs a Roman military term. A legion at full strength consisted of about 5000 soldiers, but they were rarely at full strength and more often consisted of 3000 soldiers.
- Suggests the sheer magnitude of the demonic forces within the man and with which Jesus is confronted. And successfully vanquishes. The provides another point of emphasis for Mark. If the forces before him are as great as the number suggests, then how much greater must Jesus be to have dismissed them with such ease.

### **Transfer to the pigs**

- Realizing that despite their huge numbers, they are no match for Jesus, the demons attempt to negotiate a way out of their predicament. It seems for a moment that the two parties have reached a mutually amicable agreement. The demons will leave the man but do not have to leave the land. (This idea of their possession of the land is also reinforced by the use of the name Legion which carried within its militaristic framework, the notion of possession of the land.)
- However, incapable of constraining their brutal rage, they unintentionally destroy their new lodgings and thwart their own desire to remain on Gerasene soil.

### **The Response of the People**

- How is their reaction explained in part by Mark 4.11-12?
- Like the demons, the people are initially drawn to Jesus, almost against their will.
- Like the demons, their overriding reaction is driven by fear.
- This reaction causes them to plead that he leave them alone.
- They evict Jesus in a desire to maintain control of the land.
- As often the case in Mark, the human reactions mirror the demonic reactions, which is implied to be the source of the human reactions.

### Third Section (Mark 6.6b-8.21)

This section begins like the first two sections, with the commissioning of the disciples (6.7-13; 1.16-20; 3.13-19), which follows the transitional summary of Jesus movement and activity (6.6b, 1.14-15; 3.7-12). This time, in contrast to the first two commissioning, the disciples actually go and do something, namely proclaim repentance, cast out demons, and heal the sick. They are also prominent in the two feeding miracles, acting as intermediaries between Jesus and the hungry crowds and conveying the crowds concerns to him and his nourishment to them (6.35-43; 8.5-8). Despite their increasing participation in Jesus' ministry, the disciples also display a decreasing spiritual IQ, asking dumb questions, doubting Jesus' capacity to save, and even demonstrating the quality of hard heartedness, which had previously been ascribed to Jesus' adversaries, the Pharisees (6.35-37, 52; 7.17-18; 8.14-21).

The focus of this section, however, is not so much on them as it is on Jesus, especially his capacity as a provider of food. Not only does he feed the multitude on two separate occasions (6.30-44; 8.1-9) but he also discusses food twice with the disciples (7.17-23; 8.14-21) and once with an unnamed Gentile woman (7.24-30). The feast that Jesus provides in the first feeding seems to be juxtaposed with the banquet scene in Herod's palace, which climaxes with the grisly sight of John the Baptist head on a plate.

The theme of food, then, dominates this section from first to last; Jesus provides "bread from heaven" (John 6.31-33), implicitly assuming the mantle of Moses, the distributor of manna. Not everyone, however, can recognize him for who he is, and some people prefer "the leaven of malice and evil" to his "unleaven bread of sincerity and truth". (1 Cor 5.8)

### THIRD SECTION

Wilderness Feeding, Testing and incomprehension (8.1-21)

Jesus Put to the Test by the Pharisees (8.10-13)

#### Overview

- The Feed of the Four Thousand (8.1-9)
- Pharisees Demand a Sign from Heaven (8.10-13)
- Discussion with the Disciples about leaven and bread (8.14-21)
- The section is bound together by:
  - A couple of sea crossing (8.10, 13)
  - The Theme of bread (8.1-9, 14-21).

#### Exodus & Mark

- In the background of this section is the imagery and theology of the exodus.
- The miracle of the feeding recalls the manna miracle of Exodus 16.
- This imagery is strengthened by:
  - The Pharisees' call for a sign (8.10-13)
  - Jesus subsequent warning about leaven. (8.14-21)

#### Scriptural Text

10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. 11 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. 12 And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation." 13 And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side. Mark 8.10-13 (NRSV)

#### Unusual Features

- The passage and episode are short.
  - Jesus crosses the sea.
  - Exchanges three sentences with the Pharisees.
  - Then immediately crosses back.
- The Pharisees demand for a sign is also unusual.
  - In Old Testament, Jewish traditions, and the New Testament signs are most often given in order to confirm explicit to implicit claims that have already been made.
  - Here the Pharisees demand a sign even though Jesus has made no explicit claim in this setting.
- Anti-climatic ending
  - Jesus response to their demand? Simply to say no sign will be given.

### Chiastic Structure

8.10 - Jesus enters boat

8.11-Pharisees come out to test Jesus.

8.12a-Jesus sighs and wonders why this generation demands a sign.

8.12b-Jesus rejects the demand for a sign.

8.13-Jesu enters boat and goes to the other side.

### Why Focus on the request?

- The focus seems to be on “the mystery of the dominion of God,”
  - This is the perplexing problem of why God’s power and purpose, instead of overwhelming all opposition, meets with skepticism and rejection.

### Outsiders

- Passage begins with the Pharisees coming out top dispute with Jesus.
- The verb used may be in place to link the Pharisees with the outsiders of 4.11.
- This symbolic nuance of “came out” would fit with the blindness the Pharisees display in this passage.
- This too recalls that of the outsiders in 4.21.
- This blindness is reflected in their need for a sign when Jesus has just performed one.

### Requesting Signs

- In the Old Testament, it is not always a sign of disobedience to request a sign.
  - Gideon laid a fleece before the Lord to determine whether God had chosen him as an instrument of military deliverance. (Judge 6.36-40)
  - Hezekiah asked for and received a sign that he would be healed of a grave illness. (2 Kings 20.8-11)
  - God insisted that Ahaz ask for a sign from heaven to confirm that God would deliver Judah. (Isaiah 7.10-12)
- Other passages express some skepticism about requesting signs, and there is a more negative view taken of those who request them.
  - In Deut. 13.1-5, a sign working prophet who preaches apostasy is to be put to death.
  - The New Testament often describes false prophets as working signs and wonders (Mark 13.22; Rev. 13.13)
- Later in Mark, Jesus Himself will respond positively to the disciple’s request to tell them the sign that the end time events (eschatological) are about to occur (Mark 13.4-31)
- But this differs for the Pharisees’ request:

- The Pharisees seek authentication that Jesus is telling the truth.
- The disciples request assume the truthfulness of Jesus and seek insight on his prophecy regarding the end.

### Testing Jesus

- The word testing carries with it the concept of examination, temptation, and provocation.
- In the background hover the image of the Israelites testing of God at Massa and Meribah.
- The themes and even the vocabulary of this Old Testament event (Dt 6.16; 9.22; 33.8; Psalms 95.7-11) invite us to drawn comparisons between these events in Israel's history and the behavior of the pharisees.

### Connections to Exodus

- Some suggest that the people's request for a sign was disingenuous and really an attempt to rid them of Moses authority.
- The Pharisees demand may be similar - an attempt to remove any concept of divine authority in Jesus.
- The first 13 verse of Mark 8 thus echos the events of Ex 16.1-17.7
  - First a miraculous feeding in the wilderness.
  - Then a culpable testing by the demand for a sign.
- A small difference in the two text may reflects Mark's high estimation of Jesus.
  - In the Exodus passage, it is God whop is tested, not Moses.
  - Although the people's complaining is directed at Moses, the wording of the text makes the point that quarreling with Moses is the equivalent of quarreling with God.
  - In Mark, Jesus is tested, thus assuming the role of God in found in the Exodus passage.

### Demonic Influence

- Testing may also have a demonic nuance in its meaning.
- In Matt 4.3 and 1 Thessalonians 3.5, Satan is the tester or tempter.
- Some Jewish traditions link Satan with the testing of God in the wilderness.
- Jesus' sign in the next verse seems to suggest a Satanic interpretation of "testing"
- In Matt 4.5-7 and Luke 4.9-12, two of Satan's test of Jesus are challenges that Jesus prove His divine sonship by performing miracles and signs.
  - One of the signs is the turning of stones to bread, which brings to mind the previous miracle.
  - Jesus responds to Satan's challenge by quoting Dt. 6.16 which again refers to the event at Massah and Meribah.

### Jesus Sighs and Wonders

- the greek word translated sigh is the same verb used in the exorcism-like healing in 7.34.
- In Mark 13.20-23, Jesus prophesies that false christs and false prophets will arise and give signs that will deceive even the elect.
- God will not give authenticating signs on demand through Jesus, but false prophets will give deceiving signs, and will be followed by the masses (John 5.43).