

## Week of March 7, 2021

### Matthew 8:18-34

<sup>18</sup> Now when Jesus saw the crowd, he ordered his disciples to go over to the other side of the lake. <sup>19</sup> A legal expert came and said to him, "Teacher, I'll follow you wherever you go."

<sup>20</sup> Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens, and the birds in the sky have nests, but the Human One has no place to lay his head."

<sup>21</sup> Another man, one of his disciples, said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

<sup>22</sup> But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

<sup>23</sup> When Jesus got into a boat, his disciples followed him. <sup>24</sup> A huge storm arose on the lake so that waves were sloshing over the boat. But Jesus was asleep. <sup>25</sup> They came and woke him, saying, "Lord, rescue us! We're going to drown!"

<sup>26</sup> He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you people of weak faith?" Then he got up and gave orders to the winds and the lake, and there was a great calm.

<sup>27</sup> The people were amazed and said, "What kind of person is this? Even the winds and the lake obey him!"

<sup>28</sup> When Jesus arrived on the other side of the lake in the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed came from among the tombs to meet him. They were so violent that nobody could travel on that road. <sup>29</sup> They cried out, "What are you going to do with us, Son of God? Have you come to torture us before the time of judgment?" <sup>30</sup> Far off in the distance a large herd of pigs was feeding. <sup>31</sup> The demons pleaded with him, "If you throw us out, send us into the herd of pigs."

<sup>32</sup> Then he said to the demons, "Go away," and they came out and went into the pigs. The whole herd rushed down the cliff into the lake and drowned. <sup>33</sup> Those who tended the pigs ran into the city and told everything that had happened to the demon-possessed men. <sup>34</sup> Then the whole city came out and met Jesus. When they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

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### On The Road Again

I've lived in a lot of places throughout my life - moving to Reidsville marked the 21st move in 33 years. I moved elementary schools 6 times. I've lived in three states and two countries. It's a lot. When I tell people about all my moving they inevitably offer me sympathy or say how difficult it must have been, but really, I think it has made me better suited to interacting with various people, no matter where they're from or what they're like. In every new place, whether it was down the street, across town, or in a new country, I've had to learn to engage new peoples, and sometimes entirely new cultures, in order to find a niche and begin to settle. Maybe I was already wired that way, but the moves I've made have enabled me to befriend a wider array of people than I otherwise would have. At the end of the day, I think it makes me better suited for ministry, because I have to use those skills if I'm going to be successful in my leadership roles in the church.

Jesus, too, was a traveling man. He even said he had no real place to call home - his life was traveling to new places, encountering new people, and offering them his gospel message of truth, love, forgiveness, and change. After healing many people, he and his disciples traveled to another region, this time "on the other side of the lake." That might seem close to us, but the other side of the lake, which was Lake Gennesaret (aka the Sea of Galilee), was an entirely different place, filled with people of a different culture and different religious background, and traveling there was a risky decision. As if to underscore the danger they faced in this trip, the weather also did not cooperate, creating deadly waves that threatened to sink their ship. We should understand this storm as not just a physical storm that brought real dangers, but also a metaphorical storm describing the dangers they were stepping into by crossing this divide and encountering the

people that lived in what was then known as Gaulanitis, now known as the Golan Heights. The solution for the metaphorical and physical was the same, however - faith. Jesus calmed the winds and the waves while simultaneously calming the fears of his disciples by again showing his true self - he was God's son, through whom all things will be reconciled, even the seemingly impossible.

Despite Jesus' show of power, the trip didn't go as well as they'd have liked. Immediately they were accosted by two men who were demon possessed and who lived in the graveyard. Can you imagine a more frightening welcome to a new place? But Jesus again showed his power, casting out the demons, who were subsequently put into a herd of pigs, which then ran off of a cliff. For Jesus' Jewish disciples, it would have seemed to be a great success - pigs were forbidden anyhow, so no big loss. But this wasn't a Jewish country, they were Greek, and they did not have the same rules about eating or being near pigs, so it was a big deal for them. And in response to losing a whole herd of pigs, apparently more concerned with the pigs than the men who were healed, they begged Jesus to get out of their community.

This was an early test of Jesus' message to the gentiles, and it did not go well. The cultural assumptions the disciples made lead to a complete breakdown of relationship before one could really start. It was a lesson for them, as Jesus would be leading them to many new places, that if they're going to succeed in traveling throughout the region and spreading Jesus' message, they'd need to learn how to interact with peoples of various cultures and backgrounds, because Jesus' message wasn't just for the Jews of Judah, it was for the whole world. We have to learn this lesson, too, if we're going to 1) travel, and 2) be disciples of Jesus Christ in our very globalized society. How can we interact with others, and how can we live into our call without putting up more barriers than already exist?

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*God of all peoples and all places. We offer thanks for the blessed diversity of your creation, but also confess our frustration, because it can be hard having to interact with so many different people. But you call us to minister and share your love with all people in all places. Help us live by faith, that just as Christ calmed the storm on the sea, he can calm the storm of fear and anxiety that live in each of us. Amen.*