

MARK 4:35 - 5

The theme of faith -Trust - in Jesus and his divine authority is key in these passages. What does it mean to trust Jesus? How do we live life in trust? How do we trust even when we don't yet fully understand? How is trust a necessary first step on a journey of deeper understanding and acceptance of truth, and the truth that is Jesus, no matter where it must lead us in terms of change? How is trust the antidote to fear and the path to opening the door of the heart to compassion?

1) 4: 35-43

Here Jesus is shown to have power even over the natural elements. In the New Testament world, natural phenomena, and physical manifestations of evil (disease) were linked to spiritual deformation and oppression. The person was seen as a psychosomatic whole. This is also the case with the storm. The ship upon which the disciples and Jesus are on is caught in a vicious storm. But this storm is as much about the state of their souls as it is about the state of their physical welfare. How will they find their way through?

Jesus challenges their fear with faith. The alternative to faith is taking matter into their own hands and being overwhelmed by the waves, so to speak. This is not to say that there were not constructive things they could do. They had to steer the ship and keep the deck as clear of clutter or water as possible. But without trust, they would lose their capacity to reason and to stand firm. Through Jesus' dramatic action, they are reminded that their whole lives are in his care.... if they can believe it! God is in Jesus and no storm is beyond God's capacity to work through and bring new life beyond a figurative & literal death.

2) 5: 1-20

This is one of the most difficult stories in the gospels to comprehend. The man who is at the centre of Jesus' attention is one who has lived with a longstanding demonic torment. He is imprisoned by his past and is kept from living a normal life in community with others. He is isolated and alone, and he is destructive to himself and anyone who comes close. Jesus identifies the problem as demonic (or evil). As we have already seen, illness is the work of the evil one and his forces whose key aim is to destroy not only body but soul. Faith is the great enemy of the demons, because faith opens up the heart to healing and resurrection, and ultimately to love. The man lives among the tombs. He is like a walking zombie. His demons are called legion (a military term). Jesus is in battle with malignant forces that can possess a man and keep him tormented and in chains.

The swine who serve as the carriers for the many demons descend off a cliff into the depths of the ocean. In ancient times, it was the oceanic depths or abyss that were believed to be where evil had its home. In a sense, the legion of demons were sent back

to where they came from - the depths of chaos. In a further sense, Jesus is continuing God's creative work from the beginning, creating order and life out of chaos and death.

The people of the area ask Jesus to leave. Why? Maybe they are upset about the loss of all those pigs. Maybe they are afraid of change. Even if it is healing that comes, the truth and its liberating power can be disruptive of relationships and ways of living, even if life is broken and in need of healing. Those who are not open to change and re-ordering are not open to Jesus either. He is a threat. Malignant forces keep them mistrusting rather than open in faith to new ways of being, to experiencing healing as the opening of the heart to love.

3) 5: 21-42

Here we have two incidents folded together into one, and both on the theme of faith and its healing power. A woman is healed in her present and a child is healed for her future. In both cases, it is faith and the challenge of faith that makes the difference. Can they trust in what cannot seem possible? Are they open to change, even in the natural order of things? Death is seen as the final and most severe enemy representing the evil one. Jesus calls it sleep and the girl is resuscitated as a symbolic foretaste of the resurrection to new life.

In the case of the woman with the issue of blood, it is fascinating that Jesus experiences power going out of him, and also, that this woman trusts her action as possibly sufficient for her healing. It is almost as if she has healed herself, creating the conditions for her own healing. If she touches Jesus, she believes, it is enough... and it is. Jesus' words simply confirm that it is her faith that has healed her and that his healing power has responded to that, even though the woman activated this power in him. Jesus' healing power is activated by faith and the kind of need open to his love. This woman had to have a lot of faith to do what she did. But she also needed Jesus and the healing energy of love that flowed from him.

Faith is trust and trust is relational. We have to believe **in** something or someone. But it must also be **our** faith, **our** trust. It has to arise from within us and be part of our very identity. In the Lord's prayer we pray: 'give us this day our daily bread' - in other words, give us this day our daily sustenance, our daily faith, our daily trust nourishing our souls and grounding us in the storms of life when we lose sight of the shoreline or our way to the other side. It is also trust that will get us through, in the end, making our death a sleep from which we will awake on the other side. Death is real life, and it is reflective of so many ways are spirits are imprisoned.

How active is your faith in the face of various obstacles and challenges in your life and your relationships? Without faith (trust) the door to a deeper compassion cannot open.