

Joe Dodds – long time FCC member and friend - passed away this week. Joe and I got close as a result of a missions trip I led to France 15 years ago. It was then I learned his story.

Joe was saved later in life. He used to say to me, “Pastor, if you’d have known me then – you wouldn’t have liked me very much.” Joe told me – he used to be an angry, abusive man who drank too much. He said he wasn’t a good husband nor a good role model for his son.

But one day - Joe heard the Gospel and he gave his life to Jesus Christ. And he got “saved” what we Christians like to say. And his whole life changed suddenly and dramatically! He quit drinking. He quit cursing. He read the Bible. He went to church. And he worked to be a better husband and father.

Joe is a testimony to what God can do with so-called “Hopeless Cases.” And there are many more like him. Some the result of their sin – and some for no fault of their own.

You might feel hopeless today. From illness. Addiction. Depression. Unemployment. Divorce. Leaving you feeling trapped, disheartened – and hopeless. And if you do – or if you know someone who is – I think you’ll find hope from what we’ll learn about Jesus this morning.

We’re continuing our series in the Gospel of Luke. Luke is interested in reporting the truth about what God has done through Jesus Christ. Namely that Jesus is the Savior for EVERYONE in the world.

In Luke 8, Luke records for us 4 amazing stories. Each one of these stories showcases Jesus’ authority and power. Luke wants us to see these 4 magnificent busts of Jesus’ power – one after the other - for what they reveal about Jesus and the hope they instill in us.

Let’s take these stories one by one...

Jesus Calms the Storm [read luke 8:22-25]

One day Jesus determined that He and His disciples should cross the Sea of Galilee. So they boarded a boat and started across. And because Jesus was tired – he fell asleep onboard.

Suddenly, a fierce storm rolled in. Given the Sea of Galilee’s topography – pop-up storms weren’t unusual. That’s because the Sea of Galilee was 700 feet below sea level with

steep hills all around. So cool air was able to rush down the hills and collide with the warm air over the water. The result was an instant storm.

This one was apparently intense. The boat was being “swamped”- and even though some of them were professional fishermen – in their judgment: they weren't going to make it! So, they went to Jesus and woke Him up. “Master, Master, we're going to drown!”

Jesus got up - rebuked the wind and raging waters – and immediately “all was calm.” Jesus then turned to His disciples and asked them, “Where is your faith?”

Now, that's an interesting question to ask at this moment. Jesus isn't talking about initial, saving faith. He's talking about “applied faith.” The faith you have in Jesus in the midst of some pressure, trial, or temptation.

In Jesus' assessment – their fear demonstrated their lack of perception of HIS true identity. If they fully understood who He was – they wouldn't fear. Because the truth is – being in that boat - in the middle of that storm - was at that moment - the safest place on earth! Why? Because Jesus was on that boat! And there was no way Jesus was going to the bottom of that lake! No unfortunate, boating accident was possible because Jesus commands the forces of nature.

Jesus was implying that if the disciples had THAT kind of faith – they wouldn't have woken Him up. Instead, they would have broke open a pack of cards and played “Go Fish” THROUGH the storm. Or better yet – they could have ALL taken a nap through the storm.

You see: Faith in Jesus implies that Jesus will get you where He says He's taking you – regardless of what happens along the way. Whatever interruption you face (whatever potential disaster) – you can trust in God's promises, guidance, and power to get you where He said you're going.

We read this story and marvel at the miracle of Jesus calming the storm – and rightly so – it's awesome! – and I'd have loved to have seen it (from a distance, of course). And it's confirmation that Jesus is God and has ultimate authority (which will be important later when He tells them “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore...).

But don't miss the point – the miracle happened only because the disciples panicked. It's implied that they shouldn't have woken Jesus up – but instead trusted Him THROUGH the storm.

You see – even though Jesus has “all authority” – the storms **STILL COME!**

These are the situations that scare us the most – and test our faith – because we think our life is spinning out of control – we think we’re drowning – we think our situation is hopeless!

But our sense of control is ALWAYS ONLY an illusion. We are NEVER IN CONTROL of our destiny. We are always completely dependent on God to take care of us.

Jesus showed them here what He hoped they had already learned – that He is greater than every storm we face. He *permits* the storms. He *controls* the storms. And He *uses* the storms for His purposes. So we’ll know – whatever happens - we can trust Him to get us where He said we’re going.

Sometimes that means trusting Him THROUGH the storm – rather than keeping us FROM the storm.

We’re just getting started! The second story is...

The Healing of the Demon-possessed Man [read Luke 8:26-39]

The boat arrives in Gentile territory – the “region of the Gerasenes.” As soon as Jesus exits the boat He’s met by a demon-possessed man. This is an unusual encounter for a lot of reasons.

First, the man is buck naked, super strong, violent, shouting uncontrollably, and he lives in a graveyard. This kinda makes the boat ride they just got off seem like Disneyland’s whimsical “It’s A Small World” ride! This is a guy who would make anyone uncomfortable.

Luke tells us this man is possessed by some sort of spiritual power. The Bible’s view is that there is more to the world than you can see. There is a “spirit world” that is divided along the lines of its allegiance to God. Angels are PRO God. Demons are ANTI God.

Today, the popular concept of a demon is some scary creature, with drooling fangs, claws, and a menacing voice – like a “Demogorgon.” But the Bible never describes demons physically.

They’re fallen angels – which are spirit beings – and therefore don’t have a physical appearance. They’re angels - which means their abilities are limited to the spiritual realm - not the physical realm – unless permitted to “inhabit” someone.

Actually, it makes more sense for them to choose to inhabit a person who is attractive rather than scary. As Paul said in 2 Cor 11:14 that even “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” Because everybody knows, “You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

But contrary to that logic - this guy is the epitome of “scary.” And perhaps most alarming – this guy claims to know Jesus! How does this man – or WHOEVER is INSIDE this man – know who Jesus is?

These demons identify Jesus as “the Son of the Most High God.” They know Jesus has ultimate authority. This serves as sort of “outside testimony” to who Jesus is and His power. We now have “expert witness.”

And these demons (called collectively “Legion”) want to negotiate with Jesus. They ask not to be sent to the “Abyss” – the OT abode of the dead. They appear to fear the confinement that would mean. And they wouldn’t be scared unless they were persuaded Jesus could do it!

So they make a request – because apparently anything is better than the “Abyss.” They ask to go into a large herd of pigs on the hill. Jesus says, “Yes.” And the transfer from the man to the pigs takes place. And then the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

Of course, this leaves us with all sorts of questions that aren’t answered here. Why would Jesus permit this? Why did the pigs jump in the water? What happened to all the demons? How can animals be possessed? Why did the spirits need a new host at all? None of those questions are answered here – and speculation runs wild.

What we *do* know is that the exorcism was immediate and visible – validating Jesus’ power. And it had a profound effect on the pig farmers. They ran into town and reported what had happened.

A large crowd came out to see Jesus. And they found the formally demon-possessed man sitting clothed, in his right mind, at Jesus’ feet. This was just as frightening to them as the report of the high diving pigs. So, they asked Jesus to leave. This was too much for them – they wanted no part of Jesus.

Perhaps they feared more economic loss if Jesus stayed – or they feared the power of Jesus that had cured their previously possessed fellow citizen. Whatever the reason – they were done with Jesus – and Jesus decided to go.

The now-healed man however, begged to go with Jesus. But Jesus didn't permit him to follow Him. Instead, Jesus told him to go and be a witness to his community about what God did for him. So the man went away and told his story – actually the Greek word is kerusso “preached.” He “preached” what Jesus did for him.

Why couldn't he follow Jesus – like many other people were following Jesus?

I think because this man's testimony was better suited to the Gentile towns in which he lived. Among the Jews, he'd be considered unclean – both as a Gentile and as previously possessed. But, since his reputation was notorious in his country – his story of deliverance would have been very powerful and persuasive. I'm sure this guy could have sold out every coliseum in the Decapolis with his story of HOPE! If ever there was a “hopeless case” - he was it!

But Jesus gives hope to the hopeless!

This is why stories of great transformation are so powerful.

- People like Chuck Colson, Special Counsel to President Nixon, got saved in the midst of Watergate and went on to have an enormous impact for Jesus – founding “Prison Fellowship.”
- Or Lee Strobel, investigative journalist. He was a strong atheist with a Law degree from Yale. Got saved and went on to write many books and have a huge impact for Jesus.

Jesus gives hope to the hopeless!

Now, let's turn to the 3rd and 4th stories – because these are intertwined.

The Dead Girl and the Sick Woman [read Luke 8:40-56]

This a double-miracle story – and the only one of its kind in the Gospels. It's two stories – one man and one woman - interwoven. One is respected and one is ostracized. And their lives cross paths one day as they came to Jesus for help.

Jesus returned across the Sea of Galilee and a large crowd welcomed him back.

The leader of a local synagogue named Jairus approached Jesus. He fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with Him to come to his house because his only daughter, who was 12 years old, lay lying.

Jesus agreed to go. And as He was going, surrounded by a crowd, a woman who had an incurable bleeding for the past 12 years, snuck up behind Jesus and touched the edge of His cloak.

Now, having a continuous blood hemorrhage would have made her *continuously unclean*. That would have been both embarrassing and affect her ability to live normally with others – because to touch her would be to make oneself unclean.

Her sensitive condition explains why she was sneaking into the crowd. If people knew she was there – they'd be angry that an unclean person wasn't “socially distancing” from them – as God required contagious people to do in the Law of Moses. And it explains why she didn't publicly ask Jesus for help.

She worked herself through the crowd – all the way up to Jesus – and touched the edge of Jesus' cloak. And immediately she was healed! YEARS of agony and embarrassment are instantaneously stanchied. She's cured! Now, she can just sneak away and be normal again! Hallelujah!

But – as she turned to go - Jesus stopped dead in his tracks! Which must have been rather comical – given the crowd surrounding Him – like a NASCAR pileup.

And Jesus asked, “Who touched me?” Everybody looked around. Nobody admitted touching Jesus. Finally, Peter said, “Really Jesus? There are hundreds of people jammed around you. And you ask, “Who touched Me?”

And Jesus said, “No. Somebody touched me. Power has gone out from me.”

And now this woman's worst fear came true. She was exposed! And she came and fell down before Jesus and told Him her story. How she had touched Him and was instantly healed. And now what would Jesus do? Would He be angry with her? Would he rescind His healing? Would he expose her uncleanness to the crowd? None of the above.

Instead, He said to her, “Your faith has healed you. Go in peace.” This confirms that her faith played a part – she believed Jesus could do this. And Jesus' words confirmed her healing to everyone. It changed the rest of her life – and she surely left rejoicing!

But not everyone was rejoicing. Because the delay caused by the healing of this woman appears to have been fatal for Jairus' daughter. Because at that moment someone came from Jairus' house and said rather insensitively, "Your daughter is dead. Don't bother the teacher any more."

In stopping to heal a lesser medical condition – Jesus had seemingly allowed a little girl's life to be lost. It must have felt to Jairus like his ambulance got stuck in traffic! I'm sure he must have wanted to scream, "No!" and fall to the ground hopelessness.

But Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."

When they arrive at Jairus' house – Jesus selects 3 disciples to accompany him and the parents inside to the girl's room. On the way inside, Jesus told the professional mourners to stop crying – the girl would be out in minute. They laughed at Jesus' ridiculous suggestion. This serves to heighten the sense of hopelessness of this scene.

Inside, Jesus walked over to the girl, took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Jesus told them to give her some food to eat. Eating would provide assurance she was really alive and begin a return to normalcy.

Jairus and his wife were gobsmacked! They were filled with relief. Astonishment. Gratefulness. Ecstasy. Do we laugh or do we cry?!

Again, we see the importance of faith. Jesus indicated that faith is essential.

We also see that patience was necessary, too. Because we've seen Jesus raise the dead before – and we're getting pretty used to Jesus' ability to do this kind of stuff (imagine yawning at healings and resurrections!).

But what's UNUSUAL here – is that Jairus was asked to wait for his answer – and that delay proved ultimately fatal – and contributed to the situation's sense of hopelessness. When everyone else has lost hope – Jesus comes through! It's one thing to believe Jesus can do it – it's another thing to be patient for Jesus to do it in His own time.

Now, these are individually 4 great "miracle stories" about Jesus' power. But they share a common theme. Each story is "stamped hopeless." Each story shows how Jesus dealt with what was considered a "hopeless case."

1. First, the disciples are in a desperate situation on a sinking boat in the middle of a storm. The *professional fisherman* on board have determined it was **hopeless**. They shout, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!”
2. Then we meet a man who’s caught in a dreadful situation. He’s possessed by demons. He’s been driven out of town and lives in a graveyard. No one would have anything to do with him! People considered him a “**hopeless** case.”
3. Next is the story of a woman with a 12-year hemorrhage. For 12 long years she suffered with this condition, spending her life savings on physicians and “no one could heal her.” She was ostracized, isolated, and unable to worship. She concluded there was **no hope** she would ever live a normal life again!
4. Finally, we meet Jairus. Jairus’ 12-year-old daughter has some sort of illness no one can cure. She’s close to death. Jairus is desperate! He’s willing to try anything to save the life of his daughter. He succeeds in getting “the very busy and difficult to schedule Jesus Christ” to come to his house and heal his daughter. That sounds pretty “hopeful” - but on the way Jesus stops to take care of someone else! Sure, the woman’s condition was bad – BUT she’s an adult and her problem isn’t life-threatening. “Come on, Jesus! Hurry up! My daughter might not make it!” And while Jesus is asking the crowd some silly question “Who touched Me? Does anybody know Who touched Me?” – wasting time - someone comes to Jairus and says, “your daughter is **dead**; don’t trouble the Teacher anymore.” And suddenly - Jairus’ situation went from “hopeful” to **hopeless!**

Throughout these stories we hear the desperation building like a crescendo. We are sinking!
 The demoniac can’t be chained! The woman can’t be cured! The girl is NOW DEAD!

And in each case Jesus shows us the wonderful truth: There are NO HOPELESS CASES.

- He rebukes the wind and waves saving the disciples.
- He restores the demoniac dispatching the legion of devils.
- He heals the woman from the years of suffering.
- He resurrects the girl from her death bed!

The power of Jesus is great enough to meet every need! He has power over all the forces that oppose God and us. Whether they be natural, demonic, disease, or even death. Jesus is able to reverse them all!

And what’s needed to unleash Jesus’ power? “Faith.” Faith releases the power of Jesus.

Now please notice. Jesus isn't primarily interested in PREVENTING these difficulties. After all - we live in a *fallen* world – and we are *fallen* creatures. So, troubles will keep coming – one after another – until He makes the world new.

The point isn't that faith in Jesus removes all your troubles. The point is that Jesus is BIGGER than all your troubles – and therefore whether He *acts now* or He *delays* – trusting Him is the wise choice to make.

Because when your trust is in Jesus – you're never hopeless! You have the power of God on your side - so come Hell or High Water – come Death or Disease – you know Jesus is bigger than anything you face.

There's always hope for the hopeless!