

A Man Accredited by God

Mark 4:35 - 6:6a

Turn to Acts 2. Our text today is in Mark, and has five stories. The first four of these stories have one thing in common - they are all incredible miracles.

After the kingdom parables in Mark 4, maybe you would doubt if Jesus really was bringing the kingdom. He talked about a kingdom that started small, like seed, and grew gradually, like plants do, and many died, as happens with small plants.

But still, Jesus said, there would be a great harvest at the end. A mustard seed starts small but gets very big. So, Jesus was telling them, and still tells us, that this is what the kingdom is like.

Maybe we believe that the kingdom is more like a glorious storm, so a kingdom like planting seed can't possibly be the real kingdom. These powerful miracles are to keep people from going away too soon. The miracles that Jesus performed were God's way of saying, "You people can see from the miracles that my hand is on this man Jesus, so you need to listen to him."

Signs don't bring faith, they invite faith. These great miracles were God's way of inviting faith in those who doubted that Jesus was bringing the kingdom because he talked about a kingdom that was like planting seed.

Acts 2:22 – [Peter preached at Pentecost:] *Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.* (It was the same for the apostles – see Acts 14:3.)

Peter was comfortable speaking of Jesus as a man. He was speaking to unbelievers, and this is a good way to do that. Jesus was a man accredited by God by means of miracles and wonders. By these miracles, God put his badge on Jesus. The badge said, "This man is from me, which you can see from the miracles I'm doing through him." Now we'll go to Mark 4 and look at a few of those miracles.

1 Calming the Storm – Mark 4:35–41

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Silence!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still

have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

At the end of the day, Jesus wanted to go across to the other side of the lake. It says "they took him, just as he was, in the boat." Jesus was nearly incapacitated, so exhausted that he could barely think or move. He can say, "let's go away," but he cannot even properly get himself into the boat. Even in the storm, he stayed sleeping and had to be woken up. Jesus was exhausted.

So there was a storm, and the disciples panicked. They woke Jesus: "Don't you care that we're all dying?" Jesus woke and said two words: "Quiet! Silence!" Everything became calm. He said to the disciples, "Why were you afraid? Don't you have faith?"

The disciples "feared a great fear" and asked, "who is this that even the wind and waves obey him?" On one hand, Jesus was exhausted enough to sleep through a storm, and they know it. On the other hand, he woke and told the storm what to do! Only God does that.

2 Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man – Mark 5:1–20

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went

away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Four notable things about this story. One, a huge number of terrible demons know exactly who Jesus is, and they know they must do whatever he says. And they do.

Two, the wind and the waves know who Jesus is, and the demons know who Jesus is, but the disciples don't. They ask, "who is this?"

Three, Jesus restores a man tormented by immense spiritual evil, and he becomes a relaxed sensible follower of the Lord. That's the heart of this story, how Jesus rescued the man. Four, the people in that area want nothing to do with Jesus. They plead with him to leave, so he does.

Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him.

3 A Sandwich Story – Jesus Raises a Girl and Heals a Woman – Mark 5:21–43

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with

people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

The rest of Mark 5 is one of Mark's sandwich stories, where he begins one story, then tells a second story, and then he finishes the first story. One story is sandwiched between two halves of another story.

The first story is about Jairus, a synagogue ruler, who came to Jesus because his daughter was sick and near death. He asked Jesus to come with him and heal his daughter. So Jesus walked away with him, and the crowd followed.

A woman in that crowd had had a menstrual flow of blood that had not stopped for twelve years. In the law of Moses, she was unclean until the flow stopped. But she couldn't get it to stop. She spent all she had on doctors, and got worse. She knew Jesus was not supposed to touch her. So in the crowd she snuck up on him from behind, and touched the edge of his coat, and was immediately healed.

It says: *she knew in her body* that she was healed, and *Jesus knew in himself* that power had gone out from him. When she told what had happened, Jesus said to her, "Your faith has healed you." (In the boat Jesus had said, "Don't you have faith?")

Then Mark takes us back to the first story. (Matthew and Luke also tell this as a sandwich story, but most of Mark's sandwich stories are *not* sandwiches in the other Gospels.)

Someone told Jairus that his daughter had died, so he shouldn't bother Jesus any more. This is an important part of the story, people. Even powerful healers can't deal with death. But Jesus says to Jairus, "Don't be afraid, only believe, only have faith." Jesus went to Jairo's house, where funeral proceedings were in full swing, and brought the twelve year old girl back to life.

A man accredited by God by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did through him.

Four great miracles: Jesus commanded wind and waves and they obeyed. He threw a huge number of demons out of a man that no one could tame, and turned the man into an evangelist. He healed a woman that twelve years of doctors could not help. And as a climax, he raised a dead girl back to life.

4 Hometown Rejection – Mark 6:1-6

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Jesus went back to his home town, and taught there in the synagogue. They were amazed at his teaching, just like in the synagogue in Capernaum in Mark 1. But in his home town it went in a very different direction. After Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples looked at each other in fear and asked, "Who is this?"

The wind and the waves know, and the demons know. Here, in Jesus' hometown, they also know who Jesus is: he's the builder, he's Mary's son, he's the brother of these other people, and they talk about his brothers and sisters.

And they were offended at him. Jesus could hardly do any miracles there. The last line of the story is important: Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith.

There is something important here about faith. Look at the end of 6:3 - "What's this wisdom that's been given to him, that he even does miracles?" We think lack of faith means lack of confidence that Jesus can do miracles.

These people knew that Jesus could do miracles. That's what offended them. "Who does this Jesus think he is, going around teaching powerfully and doing miracles? He has no business carrying on like that. He's just ordinary Jesus, grew up here. We know him!" But they don't, not at all.

Their lack of faith was hardness toward him. When Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid, only have faith," do you think Jairus was confident that his daughter would be raised? Not a chance. But he was open enough to let Jesus come to his house.

Miracles are signs. Signs don't create faith, they invite faith. Faith has a lot to do with letting Jesus be the king in whatever way he wants to be king.

In the boat, Jesus said, "don't you have faith?" And the disciples said, "Who is this?" The people in Jesus' hometown were sure that Jesus was nothing special, they were offended at him, and Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. In this section of Mark, faith is *not* being sure that Jesus will do a miracle. Nazareth had that, and it made them grumpy.

The parables in Mark 4 teach that the kingdom is like planting seed. Much seed does not grow but some does, and at the end a great harvest. How do we put that together with the great miracles at the end of Mark 4, and in Mark 5?

The miracles are signs that the kingdom has arrived in Jesus. And they also give a flavour of the kingdom. Jesus' miracles are not just power shows. He does not make a house rise into the air, or turn the rain off and on.

All the miracles rescue people. The miracles don't just show power, they show flavour as well. They all show that God has compassion on people in their misery, and wants to rescue them, and make their lives better. The kingdom has power to make this happen.

And yet when Jesus *teaches* about the kingdom, he never talks about miracles of healing or rescue. The miracles draw people to Jesus, but once he has their attention, he tells them that the kingdom is like planting seed, which slowly grows.

When Jesus first called the fishermen, he said, "Follow me." Later in Mark he will say, "If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

Jesus had a tough job. He invited people into the kingdom. The kingdom centers on God rescuing people, healing them, giving them life. But for Jesus himself, bringing the kingdom was the road to being rejected and crucified.

And for those who joined the kingdom, their road in the same way meant denying themselves, getting ready to die, and following Jesus. How does that fit with the God of love rescuing people, healing them, giving them life?

How can Jesus convince people that these two go together? That getting ready to die, and following him is the road to salvation and healing and life? **It takes a great willingness to follow Jesus even when this is not making sense. That's the faith he treasures.**

Follow me, he said. He rescued and healed. But people really needed to leave the rescuing in his hands, and instead of chasing rescue, follow the Rescuer. We need to leave healing in his hands, and follow the Healer. Let Jesus be King in the way he wants to be King. God enabled him to do wonders so we would follow him. Amen.

PRAYER: Father, thank you for accrediting Jesus so generously with miracles, signs, and wonders. Thank you for doing those so plentifully, so that we knew your hand was on him. And now we have decided to follow him. Lord, may we be fruitful seed. May our roots go deep enough to take the heat. May we not get choked by thorns. Help us be fruitful seed. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.