

Psalm 130
Mark 5:1-43

“Dead man walking!”

“Dead man walking!”

That’s what the prison guards call out as a condemned death-row inmate leaves the cell for the last time on the way to the execution chamber. Loud words that echo down hallways of concrete and steel, gray and bleak. Loud words that precede the funeral-like march to the certain death of someone so incorrigible as to be deemed unfit for further existence – someone beyond the capacity for human redemption.

Can you picture it? Can you hear it? Can you feel the hopelessness and the dread certainty of each measured step down that terrible hallway? Do you have any sense of what it is to be so lost as to welcome the finality of death rather than the torment of daily life?

Psalm 130:1-4

Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice! Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If thou, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

There are surely some of you out there this morning who woke up to a self-condemnation, to a life of addiction, of corruption, of despair so thorough that you can hear that voice loud and clear before you take your first step out of bed, “Dead man walking!”

“Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!”

Jesus has a word for you.

Psalm 130:5-6

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

There are some of you suffering from pain, disease, and grief. No end in sight, no promise in all the kind words, supportive friends, attentive doctors, well-meaning clergy. You are alone and have gone past the point of being scared; more resigned to living a marginally alive life. A life characterized by two certainties: profound loss and increasing isolation.

Jesus has a word for you.

There are some of you on the cusp of hope and despair, about to lose your rudder in the waves of angst and overwhelming circumstances. Every step you take, from moment to precarious moment in your day, feels like it’s a step on shifting sands. You are caring for a loved one, your child, your parent, your spouse – and how could anyone ever be prepared for anything like this? How can anyone withstand the crushing weight of one

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impossible decision, one bleak prognosis after another? How does hope stay alive in the midst of all this?

Jesus has a word for you.

Psalm 130:7-8

O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

“Talitha cumi!” Arise child!

The possessed man, the unclean woman, the dead child. Jesus effectively says the same to each, “Talitha cumi! Arise child!” Are you all hearing this? Talitha cumi! Jesus is saying that to you here, now, today! Can you hear him? Will you hear him? Beyond the crowds who insist “Dead man walking!”? Beyond your fears, the demons of your own mind, that shout even louder, “Dead man walking!”? Beyond the pain of separation and loss which whispers insidiously, “I am but a shape that stands here, a pulseless mould, a pale past picture, screening ashes gone cold.”? A dead man walking?

The man, the woman, the child. They were all ritually unclean, untouchable, doomed. Everyone else had given up on them. The man was demon possessed, living among tombs with no one even believing in his humanity anymore, much less trying to care for him. And yet Jesus calmly and purposefully ministers to the man; he silences the crowd, in this case a crowd of demons, and speaks an alternate word of life. And the man is healed and delivered back into the land of the living.

The woman hemorrhaging blood had been given up on, she'd pretty much given up on herself. She'd spent all her resources searching for a cure – to no avail. Her condition was dire, much as the demoniac's, draining of her lifeblood, shunned as untouchable by others. And yet Jesus calmly and purposefully ministers to the woman; he silences the crowd, in this case the crowd of religious tradition and superstition, and speaks an alternate word of life. And the woman is healed and delivered back into the land of the living.

The child is dead. The crowd knows it and has started mourning. The parents are beyond being able to make more than a loosely conscious decision to trust Jesus for what comes next. And yet Jesus calmly and purposefully ministers to the child and her parents; he silences the crowd and speaks an alternate word of life, “Talitha cumi! Arise daughter!”

This pattern beginning to sound familiar? It should, in each of these vignettes Jesus moves right through the tumult and confusion, the pain and uncertainty, and confidently speaks a challenge to the crowd. When the crowd pronounces, “Dead man walking!” Jesus answers poignantly, “Arise child!” And whose word carries more weight? That's

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Bradford L. Walters
Talitha cumi!

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right, Jesus, who stills the storm with a word, who cures with a touch, who sends out disciples to do likewise indwelt with his own Spirit, the Spirit of God, to preach the good news again and again to all who will listen. “Talitha cumi! Arise child, for with God’s arrival comes love, with God’s arrival comes generous redemption. And he will redeem his children from all their iniquities”; from all their fears, pains, corruption and despondence. This the word of the Lord to every man, woman and child. Feel it, hear it, live it, proclaim it! Talitha cumi!