

Epiphany 5 Year B 2021 Mark 1:29-39 Scott MALCOLM

I must admit I was feeling nervous. The weekend had gone well. It was the first time I'd been asked to do anything quite like this, 300 young people in a tent on Friday night, all day Saturday, and today, Sunday morning. It felt a lot more work now, than it did at the time I was approached about the Easter Camp.

It had gone well, and now it was time to finish everything off. The traditional finale of Baptist Easter Camps is a call to follow after Jesus, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news."

Not wanting to limit the call of God on young lives, I'd not been overly specific about "what believing in the good news" might have been. There might have been mention of the Holy Spirit, getting your life right with the Lord Jesus, anything on your mind, anything bothering you, following the Lord instead of the world, all that kind of good young person stuff.

And surprisingly enough, come, they did. Quite a few of them.

But there was one woman in particular who came and whom I noticed, there was no reason for noticing her particularly, just that she caught my eye coming forward, and as I watched some of the seats empty and people moving, my gaze kept returning to her.

The music was playing and the emotion in the tent was high, as it tends to be at young people's meetings, but then as this particular young woman came forward, I felt what I can only call a shot of power, a charge like an electrical current run down from my shoulder and out through the ends of my fingers. It gave me a hell of a fright.

Nothing like that had ever happened to me before or has happened since.

But the young woman whom I'd been watching and whom I now realised I was pointing at, dropped to the ground like she'd been knocked unconscious.

As there were a lot of people around her and people still moving, I didn't really get a chance to see what had happened until one of the camp leaders told me later.

She had come forward because she had a very bad and sore back, as she was coming, she had felt something hit her and fell to the ground, when she got up and was helped by her friends, she realised her back pain had gone. It seemed that she had been healed.

In the beginning of Mark's gospel this happens a lot. The man with the unclean spirit, Simon's mother-in-law, all of the sick and demon possessed of the area. Healing and exorcism are very important to Mark as this gospel takes shape.

In fact, in all of the gospels, it's Mark where these things are given the greatest prominence, and in these first 39 verses we get a picture of what Jesus ministry is going to be, healing and exorcism are a huge part of it.

Which is fine for Mark, when this kind of thinking was the norm. All sickness and disease, all human frailty were considered under the influence of these powers. But what are we to do with this? All these years later, what do we make of healing and demon possession?

Well, some think that because it's in the Bible, it must be the same as it always was ... but the bible also says if our eyes or hands cause us to sin, we should pluck them out and cut them off ... and that's obviously not a goer. So how does it work?

I can only offer my opinion here, and don't want to give any more weight to what I'm saying than that, but as far as healing goes, I think the issues around that, are not, does God heal? But how do we cope if healing doesn't happen. What do we do if it doesn't work? That's much more of a problem for us. If someone is healed, then the joy of that usually overcomes any sceptical questions.

I think demon possession is another matter. But in my experience, I have seen many things that can take control over a person and their lives; substances, greed, lust, and violence. And how often do we come across an act of great violence or evil, and we wonder how a human being could do such a thing? The massacre in Christchurch for example, are these events simple human badness?

Whatever we choose to call these things, the gospel of Mark, declares to anyone, in Jesus day or today or anytime in between, that no matter what we call them ...

Jesus Christ the Son of God has power and authority over them all, right down to their reason for being!

Mark declares that Jesus power over all human frailties, weaknesses, wickedness, over demons if you like, is absolutely sovereign. As it is over sickness and disease.

So sovereign in fact that a young preacher, who doesn't know his head from his foot, can be going about his business in complete ignorance, and then that power falls and something extra ordinary happens, and a young woman's life is forever changed.

Thanks be to God.