

Mark Part 5

Mark 4:35-5:43

Two Sandwich Stories

Sandwich One

Deliverance between chaos and calm

Sandwich Two

Life between sickness and death

**Holiness is not a thing to be protected but a
relationship to be shared**

The point:

- **Jesus will calm chaos to reach you.
There is no amount of evil that cannot
be cured.**
- **Jesus will travel as far as necessary to
restore life for you: to death and back.**

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The Gospel of Mark

4:35-5:43¹

John Montagu lived in the 1700s and was as well-known as a gambler as he was lazy. He was so committed to both, that he would be at the gambling tables and refuse to get up to even eat. So, instead of getting up to eat a proper meal, bread and meat were brought to him. He didn't want to be distracted from his gambling by eating, so he would pile up thinly sliced bread and put the meat in it – all because he was too lazy to get up from the table or stop gambling.

John Montagu was also the 4th Earl over the county of Kent, in England, of the house of Sandwich. Montagu's fast meals began to catch on with the elites, and upscale dining clubs began to serve the dish of the Earl of Sandwiches, or as they became known – sandwiches. There's your trivia for today!

The thing about sandwiches is that you need three things – you need two slices of bread, and you need stuff in the middle. You take away any of those and you don't have a true sandwich.

I'm telling you that, because in the passage that we're looking at today (that hopefully you've read) in the Gospel of Mark, it serves up to us two story sandwiches – two stories that have two things on either side of them, with good stuff in the middle – all to show us how powerful and personal the love of God in Christ is for our lives. If we take away any part of these two sandwich stories, they lose the significance of what God wants to tell us. Do I have your interest?

Excellent.

So if you are a *not* a Christian today, here's what you want to listen for: you are never too far gone for God's love to reach you. There is nothing you have done that God won't forgive and heal and deliver you from. His holy love will transform you.

If you *are* a Christian today, here's what *you* want to listen for: the world and its sin and evil cannot infect you; you can't "catch" sin or unholiness by being out in the world. In fact, the opposite is true: Christ's presence in you can transform people and situations.

Okay. I hope you've read this passage for today, otherwise you will have missed the entire context, because I'm not going to read it to you – but let me refresh your memory:

Jesus has just finished teaching while standing in the boat a little ways off shore. That was in the passage that Pastor/Fire Chief Jim Beattie shared with us last week. Jesus was teaching for hours and it's getting dark, so without even getting out of the boat, Jesus tells the disciples to take him to the other side of the lake. He doesn't say why. On their way

¹ Kent Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012)
David Smith, *Mark: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007)
John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)

there, a significant storm hits them. Jesus is sleeping in the boat while the disciples panic. They wake him up, he calms the storm, and they continue on their way. They arrive in the region of the Gerasenes (*gare-u-say-nes*) and encounter a naked, super strong madman that lives in the tombs and is filled with multiple demons. Jesus delivers the man and the demons flee into a herd of pigs. Then Jesus turns around and goes back across the water.

They get back into Galilee the next morning, and there's a huge crowd waiting for Jesus, pressing in, wanting to get healed. One of them is a synagogue leader by the name of Jairus, who pleads with Jesus to come heal his sick twelve-year-old daughter. So Jesus begins the walk to Jairus' house. Along the way, a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years sneaks up behind Jesus just to touch the hem of his clothes in the hopes that she'll be healed, and she is. Jesus turns around wanting to know who in this great crowd touched him. He identifies the woman, says some amazing things to her, and then turns to get back on his way to Jairus' house when they get the news that the man's daughter has now died. But Jesus goes anyway, and raises the girl from the dead, restoring her to life and to her parents.

Got it? That's the gist of what you hopefully read in advance. Now let's find out what's so significant for us to see in it, starting with...

Sandwich One: Deliverance between chaos and calm.

This part takes place in Mark 4:35-5:20.

On their journey across the Sea of Galilee a violent storm comes upon them. The Sea of Galilee is really just the size of one of our lakes. In fact, Lake Washington near Seattle is almost the exact same size. But where the Sea of Galilee sits geographically and topographically makes it very vulnerable to storms that come up from the Mediterranean Sea that cause waves from 6-10 feet high that can easily capsize a boat – especially the kind of fishing boat they were in. We know for fact that these boats were about 27 feet long, 7½ feet wide, and only about 4 feet deep. The disciples Peter and James and John and Andrew were all experienced fisherman so they would have been used to most storms, but this storm in the dark of night is so bad that even *they* are scared to death. That tells you how bad this storm is. The word that is used in verse 37 literally means something like a sudden tornado.

In verse 38 we see that Jesus is exhausted, of course from the amount of energy he's expended by teaching and healing people for hours on end with little sleep in between, all while having to be on alert for the ways that religious leaders are trying to trap him. Jim told us about that last week. But Jesus is exhausted for a bigger reason than that – he is exhausted from the conflict he's engaged in with the supernatural forces of evil in this world. So Mark tells us that the storm arises either as resistance from evil itself, or as a symbol of the opposition from evil that Jesus is fighting.

Make no mistake my friend: there *are* supernatural forces that are beyond anything we can comprehend that are waging war for your soul. There is so much riding on your life and your decisions.

But the disciples don't see that – they are only focused on their own fear, and yet Jesus is

sound asleep. So the disciples say in verse 38, “don’t you care if we drown?” The original language is not a question; it is an accusation: “You don’t even care if we drown!” Imagine telling God himself, who has given up his throne to come rescue them and die for them, that he doesn’t care about them! The whole reason Jesus was there was *because he cared about them supremely*. How selfish could they be?

You and I would never do that, would we? “I don’t have enough money and God doesn’t even care.” “My marriage is in trouble and God could care less.” Or, “I’m single and God wants me to be alone.” Or, “I’ve got cancer and Jesus isn’t doing anything about it.” My friend: just because you *think* he’s asleep doesn’t mean he doesn’t care – the entire reason he came to earth and died and rose from the dead is because he cares very much for you. Supremely.

Mark’s description of the storm on the dark sea is painting a couple of extreme pictures for us. One image is of the abyss.

If you were in a sailboat out in the middle of the ocean away from all land, and it was night time, would you go swimming? I mean the odds of something happening to you are slim. But there are miles and miles of dark abyss under you, and you can only see about two feet in any direction. *I wouldn’t do it!* Now imagine that same scenario and there are 6-10 foot swells. *That* just gives you the idea of the biblical concept of abyss.

In the Bible, this abyss has always represented the place of death and judgment for people and the ultimate destiny of Satan and his demons. Remember the story of Jonah and whale? Being swallowed by the whale and taken to the depths of the abyss represents death. By the way, Jonah was down there for three days. Didn’t Jesus say that Jonah foreshadowed what would happen to him – three days in the grave?

Beyond that, from the very beginning, the stormy abyss has always represented all evil and chaos. Have you read the first two verses of the book of Genesis? We’re told that in the beginning of all creation, the earth was formless and empty and darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. The words for deep and waters are *tehom* and *mayim*. They literally mean the abyss and chaos. And what did God do in the midst of chaos and abyss? He spoke, and calm and creation came into being.

Here in Mark, we see Jesus hovering over the chaos and abyss of evil and death, and what does he do? In verse 39 he speaks; he rebukes it and says three words: “Quiet. Be still,” and everything is suddenly completely calm. Jesus is not some guy who has a lot of trust in God; *Jesus is God*. Only God Himself can have that kind of power over creation and evil. Only God can calm the chaos.

So then Jesus says to the disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” He’s not criticizing them. He’s asking them, “after all you’ve seen, do you still not know who I am? After all I’ve explained to you, after all the mysteries that have been revealed to you, do you still not know who I am?” But they give their answer right away in verse 41: “Who is this?”

Even after Jesus mirrors the creation event itself and calms the chaos with a word, the disciples still don’t get it. Jesus can calm their storms – and ours – if we have faith.

But listen: the chaos and real frightening things that you go through are real. Trusting

Jesus doesn't mean if you just have faith, everything will be calm, as if having enough faith will calm every storm you go through. The disciples are really afraid and for very good reason. There is only about six inches of wood between them and the abyss. Even Jesus faced fear the night before he was arrested and crucified; he begged God to deliver him from the coming chaos and abyss of his torture and crucifixion and death. But ultimately Jesus said, "I'll obey no matter what." Listen: God's people are not immune from the fears that threaten to overwhelm us. *But the good purposes of God will ultimately triumph.* Sometimes that will happen through the immediate calming of the storm we face. Other times, God gives us the courage and hope to face the storm. Either way, the God who created everything and has authority over evil cares very much for you.

So they continue their trip to Gerasenes. This place is entirely Gentile territory – no good Jew would ever set foot over there, but Jesus tells the disciples "we're going there," and on landing they are immediately confronted by a man filled with a legion of demons. The disciples are still asking themselves, "Who is this guy Jesus?", but when the demons see Jesus, what do they say? In verse 7 they say, "We know who you are! You are Jesus, the Son of the Most High God!" In fact, in the first half of Mark, the *only ones* proclaiming Jesus is Christ are the demons, *not* the disciples!

Friend: you may not know who Jesus is, but the very demons of hell do. Or, you may say you know who Jesus is, but does it motivate you to change your life? The demons of hell know who Jesus is and they are terrified by him. In the Bible, James 2:19 it says (and I paraphrase): "You sit back all proud of yourself because you say you believe Jesus is God, but you don't do anything about it. The demons believe Jesus is God and it terrifies them!" These demons are scared!

So here is this poor man, a wild, naked guy filled with thousands of demons. You could say he was *a rude nude dude filled with a multitude!* (If you are listening to this sermon in Spanish, I just said something really clever in English with words that rhyme. I'm not so clever in Spanish.)

Here is this crazed man who lives naked in the tombs. *He is such a social outcast that the dead are more welcoming to him than the living.* His home is in the tombs – the haunt of demons. Mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially, he is in torture. Even though restraints can't stop him, he is enslaved to evil, to chaos, to pain, to loneliness. He is completely out of human, self, and spiritual control.

The demons say they number in the thousands. A roman legion was just under 6,000 soldiers, so whether they are being literal or not, there are thousands of them torturing this guy – and trying to scare Jesus.

Let me just pause and step into this scene for a minute: you might be thinking that this story is only a metaphor. You don't believe in real demons. Or, you might be thinking that in Bible times they had no explanation for mental illness, so they blamed it on imaginary demons. Or you might think that demons were only a thing in Bible times.

Let me tell you firsthand: if a person is a seriously committed pastor, he or she can't be in ministry without at some point coming face to face with the demonic. I can tell you *I* have, and I'm not alone in that. I could share several stories, but I'm not going to go into details, because that's not the point. The point is not for us to think about how sensational the

supernatural is; the point is for us to realize who Jesus is and what he wants to do for us.

This is no mythical story. This is a real conversation that demons are having with the real Jesus Christ. And it reveals so much to us about this reality. I told you: there are spiritual forces of evil that are fighting for your soul, whether you recognize them or not. And this man was in terrible shape because of it.

So the demons try to intimidate Jesus by their sheer number. They try to exercise power over him by calling him by name. But Jesus merely says, "Tell me your name." And they do. Then they beg him to not send them into the abyss – into their final destination that awaits them. So they seek a compromise: "send us into that herd of pigs." Pigs were unclean to Jews. Jesus agrees, and the irony is that the actions of the demons drive themselves like lemmings into the very place they want to avoid: off the cliff and into the abyss.

Remember this was spiritually hostile Gentile territory. The pigs were likely being raised to be sacrificial offerings to their demonic cult gods. So pig ranchers are not happy about this event – this cost them a lot of money. Listen: when Jesus steps into your world he's going to mess up all the stuff you've been relying on, all the stuff you've built up in your life. He is a disruptor, know that for a fact.

But even more shocking, the people come running to find the demoniac man dressed, in his right mind, having a normal conversation with and worshiping at the feet of Jesus. Now they're really freaked out, but that's okay because Jesus is leaving anyway. Listen – Jesus makes it clear: *the reason for the entire trip through chaos and back was so he could deliver this one man and set him free.*

Jesus faced the evil forces of the abyss and ordered them to be calm. Jesus walked into an unclean cult worshipping country, into an unclean cemetery of the dead, to meet an unclean legion of demons filling a crazy man – all so he could set the man free and make him a clean person in an unclean world. And then Jesus told him to stay in that unclean world and tell them all about Jesus.

Then they set out back across the water – this time as calm as it could be.

The primary meaning of this first sandwich story is *not* his authority over demons, as sensational and attention grabbing as that is. The primary meaning of the story is the restoration of this man to a normal, healthy life. There is nothing Jesus won't confront or overcome to rescue you. In fact, a legion of demons is one thing; *all* the powers of the abyss and death is another thing. Yet Jesus overcame them all through his death and resurrection – to rescue you.

That is sandwich story number one: deliverance between chaos and calm.

Now to...

Sandwich Two: Life between sickness and death.

Now we've got the story of the woman with the issue of blood being healed, which is in between two more travel slices: Jesus is traveling to Jairus' house. This part of the story is in Mark 5:21-43.

Jesus doesn't even touch foot to the beach back in Galilee and there is this huge crowd waiting for him. Everyone wants a piece of him for themselves. "Heal me of this, deliver me from that." One guy named Jairus is a leader in the synagogue. He wasn't a priest; his authority was more administrative – he was responsible for overseeing the worship gatherings, maintaining the synagogue building, and scheduling Scripture readers and teachers and speakers. So Jairus has a lot of authority, but he falls at Jesus' feet. This showed his incredible faith and humility. He tells Jesus that his twelve-year-old daughter is dying. He asks Jesus to please come and simply *touch her*, and he knows she will be healed. So Jesus goes with him.

Along the way the crowd follows, pressing in on Jesus from all directions. It's slow going.

Suddenly in this picture, there's a woman who we're told has an issue of blood that she'd suffered terribly from for over twelve years. Even though she'd spent all her money on doctors, none of them were of any help to her. In fact, it just got worse.

So let me try to be discreet. There is a certain flow of blood that women experience periodically – monthly. This is necessary for women to be able to bring life into this world. But the Old Testament said that, during that week each month, the woman was considered unclean. No "clean" person could come near her or touch her. But this poor woman had been steadily unclean for every week of every month for twelve years. Like the demoniac in the last story, she was unclean, isolated, an outcast...alone. Not only that, she had no ability to bring life into this world.

Because of her uncleanness, she thought, "There's no way a holy man like Jesus would ever touch me so that I can be healed. But if I can sneak up behind him and touch him – maybe that will be enough to heal me." So she does, and it is – she is healed. What doctors couldn't do for twelve years, Jesus does in an instant. Her impurity is gone; her isolation is over. She can now be a welcome and productive part of the community of God's people.

But Jesus knows instantly that this happened. He could have kept walking, but he doesn't. He stops and wants to know who touched him. Of course, hundreds of people have been touching him in the pressing crowd, so the disciples think Jesus is asking an impossible question. Their response to Jesus is sarcastic and mocking. Of course everyone was touching him!

But for all the people touching Jesus, we don't read about any of *them* being healed. Why not? Because they just want a piece of Jesus. This woman comes to Jesus in desperation, knowing he is the only One who can help her. The crowd is demanding; she comes in humility, not wanting to impose. But Jesus keeps asking for her. The woman is afraid because she thinks that by touching him, she's now made this holy man unclean and she's going to be in trouble. She has no choice but to fall before him and hope for mercy. Jesus turns to her and his response is lavish and radical. First, he is speaking to a woman in public. Men were only allowed to do this with their wives. Then, he calls her daughter: a term of endearment that means she is a welcome member of the family of God. Third, he tells her that her faith has saved her. It wasn't how much faith she had that saved her; it was the One she put her faith in. She trusted Jesus. She'd *only heard about him* and she trusted him; the irony is that the disciples saw all his wondrous power over and over, and *they* still didn't get it. Jesus tells the woman to "go in peace;" she doesn't have to go through

any of the temple rituals for cleansing – she is totally cleansed! Finally Jesus says, “be free from your suffering.” He had so much compassion for her! This was no temporary fix; she was free for good, physically, spiritually, and socially restored to the community. Her uncleanness didn’t infect Jesus; Jesus’ holiness transformed her.

So then Jesus resumes the trip to Jairus’ house, but they get the news that there’s no point in continuing – the little girl has died. All hope is gone. This is a terrible tragedy. Not only is it the death of a girl, but she was also twelve – about the age of maturity. In that culture, that meant she was at the age to become betrothed. It seems weird to us, I know, but in those days, their life span wasn’t long, and if a woman was old enough to have children, she was old enough to be married, which was a means of family and community continuity. Here was a girl about to be able to bring life into the world, cut short by death and now she lays there unclean (because anything dead was considered unclean). Remember that Jairus asked Jesus to come *touch* his daughter. But now she’s dead, and a holy man would never touch a dead body; it would make him unclean.

So what does Jesus do? He says, “don’t be afraid. All you have to do is believe me.” And he goes into the room where the dead body is. He takes Peter, James and John with him. At Jairus’ house are all the people crying and wailing – Mark calls it a commotion – another word for chaos. Jesus says in verse 39, “Why all this chaos and wailing in hopeless sadness? The little girl isn’t dead. She’s just asleep.” They all laugh at him like he’s a fool.

So Jesus sends them all out, and takes the three disciples and the little girls’ parents into the room where she lay, and he does the unthinkable – he touches her! Even more endearingly, *he holds her hand*. Again, touching a dead person meant he would have to go through a whole week long thing of rituals in order to purify himself and be allowed back in the community. Anything or anyone who touched him during that week would also be infected with uncleanness. But Jesus takes her by the hand and says in verse 41, “Talitha koum!” which means, “little girl, I say to you, get up!” Literally, Jesus is saying, “Little lamb, because it is me who says so: come back to life!” And immediately she does!

Jesus then turns to the ones who laughed at him and tells them to get her some food. Can you imagine? “Hey, I know you called me a fool, but this once dead girl is now alive. No big deal. Don’t you think you should give her something to eat? She’s probably kind of hungry.” But more than that, Jesus is showing how much he cares for her – she’s had a long journey to death and back. She needs some nourishment.

Here’s the point of sandwich story two: there is no amount of uncleanness that can keep you from Jesus. All this time people were afraid of doing anything that would taint their ritual purity, and they had to go to extreme lengths to keep their holiness from being infected by impurity. But Jesus marches right into unclean situations for the sake of people who need to be healed and restored. Instead of his holiness being infected by impurity, Jesus transforms it by his holiness. He isn’t concerned about protecting himself from *their* sin; he’s concerned about transforming *them* with his holy love.

Holiness is not a thing to be protected but a relationship to be shared!

Remember I said if you are not a Christian, here’s what you need to listen for: you are

never so unclean that you are out of reach for Jesus. Jesus will never be overpowered by your chaos or uncleanness. Jesus will overpower chaos and uncleanness with his love for you. Jesus didn't come to condemn you; he came to be in relationship with you! He's not worried about your uncleanness; he wants to share his holy love in relationship with you, and you with the community of his people.

So here's the point of these two stories:

- Jesus will calm chaos to reach you. There is no amount of evil that cannot be cured.

That's the point of the first sandwich story. Jesus will come to you.

There was a time in my life before I became a Christian that I was sure I had done things so bad that God could never forgive me. But he still came to me and rescued me.

There have been so many people who sit in church that have said to me, "If the people around me knew what I was really like they'd kick me out. I'm a terrible person." *The ironic thing is that everyone around you thinks that, too.* And so we keep isolated from each other in our uncleanness. But you are never too far gone for God's love to reach you. There is nothing you have done that God won't forgive and heal and deliver you from. His holy love will transform you and give you a place in his community.

That's the second sandwich story point:

- Jesus will travel as far as necessary to restore life for you: to death and back.

Jesus will command that chaos be calm so he can cross it to reach you. Jesus' word is enough to set you free, to heal you, to restore life and purpose and a place to you. Like with that little girl, he will travel to death and back for you; in fact he already did: he willingly went to the cross, died, was buried for three days, and rose from the dead to say to you: "Little lamb, because I say so, be restored to true life. Take some nourishment."

Pray: altar call

Before you go, remember I said this at the beginning: If you *are* a Christian today, there was something *you* needed to listen for: the world and its sin and evil cannot infect you; you can't "catch" sin or unholiness by being out in the world. In fact, the opposite is true: Christ's presence in you can transform people and situations.

As a high school kid, before I became a Christian, let's just say I did a lot of partying. I went to a lot of what we called parties, where there was underaged drinking and drugs. Then I trusted Jesus – I was a Christian. Now, all my church friends told me I should stay away from my unchurched friends, because I was clean now and they were not. I could become tempted and infected by their sin.

So you know what I did now that I was a Christian? I went to those parties. But I did not drink or do drugs – I talked to my friends about Jesus. I really did! Eventually several of my friends trusted Jesus and became Christians and sobered up.

I'm not saying you should go to the places that are a temptation to you: you need to be wise and not put yourself in settings that are a problem for you! And if I could give my younger self some advice, I would say "don't go there! There are other places you can meet your friends." The point is not necessarily that I should have done that. The point is: as a Christian I was not afraid of being infected by sinners – I had the holy and loving Jesus in me *and he wanted a relationship with them, so I needed to take him to them – where they were.*

Christian: stop being afraid of the evil world. Stop being afraid of the chaos. Stop being afraid of Legion and evil. Stop being afraid of blood, sickness, and death. You've got Jesus in you and they need him! Get out there and love them! Holiness is not a thing to be protected; it's a relationship to be shared!

Benediction:

Please go with this assurance from Romans 8:38-39 –

“Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So let's go take Jesus into this world so he can transform it by his holy love through us.