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Opening Worship GBHEM Spring 2012 Board Meeting

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General Board of Higher Education and Ministry
The United Methodist Church
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Mark 5: 1-20 Healing of the Gerasene Demoniac

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood...

teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

-Antoine de Saint Exupéry

Our text from Mark is sandwiched between two other miracle stories, power stories. Just previous is the story of Jesus calming the furious storm of wind and waves. Just after is the story of Jesus healing Jairus' daughter. Let's look at the common themes connecting these three stories. What we have is Jesus' power over natural chaos, Jesus' power over demonic internal chaos, and power over death. What can we learn of how to face the storms, demons, and death we confront today?

In each of these stories there is a conscious lament, a recognition of powerlessness. A confession: WE ARE LOST.

In the furious storm, the disciples are sure they are going to die. While Jesus sleeps peacefully in the stern, all hell breaks loose. The disciples finally wake him in desperation, saying, "Jesus, we are dying here!!" The disciples clearly recognized their need, their helplessness, and begged Jesus to save them from a watery grave. After Jesus calms the storm, they ask, "Who is this that the wind and sea obey him?" In the demoniac story, even the demons recognized Jesus' power and begged him for mercy. Isn't it amazing that Jesus grants mercy to demons? Really? How much more, then, to us? And isn't it interesting that the demons knew who Jesus was. They called him the son of God. Jairus, the distraught father, begs Jesus for his daughter's life. His household weeps, wails, laments the little girl's death.

In each of these stories there is lament. Lament from the disciples: We are going to die!! Lament from the demons: We have met our match! Lament from the family: Our little girl is dead!! This is important. When faced with storms, demons, and death, when faced with our limits, we cry out for help! Lament! (*Gina Campbell*)

Confess we cannot, by ourselves, save ourselves. I think the first call the bishops should issue to The United Methodist Church in the U.S. is a call to lament; a call to confession. Jesus, we are dying! The storms overwhelm us! The demon of depression has us in its grasp! Death is in our house! We have lost

our life force, our passion is spent, and we have lost our way. We are bruised, tired, and broken. We no longer know who we are, where we are, or whose we are. Jesus, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Only you. Only you, Lord, can save us from the grave! Only you can call us out of the pit.

Until we lament our loss of life, our loss of young, our loss of faith; until we lament our spiritual malaise, we will dwell in the tombs with the demoniac. For whom does your heart burst? For whom does your heart cry?

We know that until our hearts burst for people of color we will continue to die in the U.S.

We know unless we nurture our own children in faith, our own grandchildren, we live in tombs!

We have not loved our neighbors.

We have not heard the cry of the needy.

Ninety percent of our youth in UMYF will not return to the church after they leave home.

This is lament! Do we not love our children as Jairus loved his daughter? We know we can't keep doing the same things and expect the same results. How must we change? What is it that we love, that is precious to us that we must release? We are under judgment, here and now. Here is the thing about lament: to "lament means to resist a quick fix. Lament takes perversity seriously. Lament recognizes we are way beyond self-help. We are dealing with a God-sized problem. Lament offers a form, a container, for anxiety. Lament is an intimate and personal address to God. Lament recognizes who has the power to heal. Lament positions us forward toward what is sensed, yet not seen." (*Gina Campbell*)

Jesus sees what we don't see. Jesus acts when we are frozen. Jesus stills the storm. Jesus frees us from our demons. Jesus – Jesus raises our dead. Jesus leads us out of the tombs. In each story, Jesus sees what we don't see. In the storm, Jesus sees the disciple's fear, and calms the fury. Instead of a lunatic, Jesus sees a lost man he loves. Instead of a dead daughter, Jesus sees a little girl sleeping. Jesus sees chaos, demons, and death very differently than we see them. In the practice of lament, there is a moment, an instant, when God turns the tide, when God acts, and we no longer wander shackled among tombs, but are in our right minds and among friends.

The first call, friends, is a call to Lament. Only after we have recognized that our need is spiritual, not organizational, will our actions be blessed.

What we need is not a new organizational chart... what we need is a new Pentecost.

What we need are hearts that burst for others to know they too are loved, rescued, redeemed, and ransomed by the same Savior that freed us from the captivity of our self-centeredness.

Our message must be clear: The United Methodist Church proclaims Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord. Jesus is The Savior, the port in the storm. Jesus is the Lord who releases us from insanity. Jesus brings life to our death.

To make disciples of Jesus Christ, you have to be one. The question we ask in lament is what must we become that these might be saved?

One more thing. Back to the demoniac story... the healed man wants to come with Jesus and the disciples. He begs Jesus to come with him. If there ever was a walking, talking living example of Jesus' power, it is this guy! Come see the man who was running around naked and howling! See the scars where he broke his shackles! Listen to him tell about his demonic possession! No. Jesus said, no. Jesus said, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you." Listen to me. He has been running around howling naked in the tombs. He doesn't have any friends... Jesus is saying, start over; you will have friends.

Being healed doesn't mean that you are called to be an apostle. Not all who hear the call of Christ are called to ordained ministry. Don't approve someone for ordained ministry because they are a sweet person and love Jesus. Exercise tough love from the start. Ask yourself, would I want this person to be my son's pastor? I say my son's pastor because we really can only reach people 20 years younger and 20 years older than we are. I am 60 years old. That limits my range. We must also ask, could this person lead anyone, anywhere? If not, kindly say to them, the call of Christ is very strong and certainly you have heard it. But Christ calls people to serve as laity too and that is the best direction to follow the call you are hearing. That is the kindest thing you can do for the person and the church. People who don't have a strong prayer life find this hard because they don't have confidence in their discernment of spiritual gifts. Wesley said, "Shall we send the dead to raise the dead?"

Remember, in our lament, there is a moment when God acts, and the tide is turned. The demons leave, and the girl takes a breath. What if we came to ourselves, what if we came to our right minds and said, Jesus, help me see my neighbor. What must we become so that these might be saved?

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