

Mark 5: 1-20 and 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27

*Break the chains, calm the anger, heal the wounds and live the dream!*

A close friend of mine is angry and praying that he will wake up soon and discover that his grief is just a dream and that his wife has not died but still walks beside him! When the unexpected happens people often say, “pinch me, I must be dreaming!” Like my friend, I’m saying it now, pinch me, I want to be woken from a dream to find that chains have been broken, all anger calmed, wounds healed and everyone is singing together a new song to the Lord. I want to wake up and see that all tears are wiped away, there is no more death, or pain or war and people have broken free from the chains of history to tell a new story. Like my friend, I want the reality of life to be a dream from which I will wake and find that the Kingdom has come, for we are all living the will of God on earth as in heaven. I realise though that life is not a dream, but our dreams of a life to be are the inspiration of hope for the future.

I have a dream of a child in Palestine breaking the chains that had held his people captive and welcoming the singer of a new song into his life. Then he is sent to sing the song and the words resonate in the hearts of people everywhere as they join their voices in harmony, hold hands in unity and dance as if one body on the great dance floor of God’s kingdom. How will such a child meet with the singer of that new song unless his cry of anger is heard and the pain he inflicts on himself is seen and understood? How can people see Jesus from a distance if he is hidden behind the religious walls of church or temple which prevent them from running to him and falling at his feet? Our mission is to go and make Jesus visible in the world so that when people have broken free from their chains they will not vent anger on their neighbours, but will become the singers of a new song for the Lord which will heal the wounds of history and bring our dreams to life.

The visible Jesus is someone who is so different from the crowd that he is recognised from a distance as the Son of God who, wrongly we believe, has come to punish us for our sins. He is not recognised simply by his voice and the words he speaks, but by his presence and his attitude which inspires us to run to him and fall at his feet.

We can so often be a church of easy words and open a book to speak a story of love and hope, but the body of Christ is like a light shining in the darkness and as visible as a city on a hill. Christ becomes visible not just through words, but in our attitude which shines for the glory of God. The expectation was that he would be the image of a Jew, a person of religious ritual and commitment, but he stood out from the crowd because he looked different. He was not the image of a religion or a culture or someone shaped by human expectation, but appears as the true image of the Father, God our maker. He is the Word of God manifest in human flesh.

“What do you want with me, Son of God?” the demon possessed man of the gospel story shouts as he recognises Jesus for who he really is. Jesus is the person who shines like a light on a distant hill to which people can run to find a welcome, an acceptance for who they are and a healing of

wounds inflicted by the past. The mission of the Church is to kindle that fire within people so they become such a light and together shine like a city in the distance. Is the Church like that city with the lights of many homes uniting with an invitation to come and find your healing and live your dream?

In 1995 the Council for World Mission produced an anthology from around the world of prayer and worship called, "Dare to Dream" that was followed by one called, "Seeing Christ in Others." I contributed to the latter and now I dare to dream of seeing Christ in others! I dream of a Church with the distinct characteristics of Jesus Christ attracting people from across all boundaries of race, faith and culture into a new relationship with God. I dream of building a Church where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the word they've known. A place where the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face; bringing to an end all fear and danger. It is a face which the child of Palestine will trust, my friend will find healing for his grief and when we wake to the reality our dreams will inspire us to reach out with a love that can end all divisions. It is the face of Christ that stands out from the crowd because it is so different that everyone, whatever their faith, culture or class find a welcome from his presence. I dream of a day when this face will be seen walking the streets; reaching out to heal; listening to every voice and seeing the needs of our communities. It will be the face of a heart filled with compassion with a head for justice and peace that inspires the feet, hands, ears and eyes to work together as one body for a new kingdom to come. I dare to dream of seeing Christ in others!

My friend is angry with God, many Palestinian children grow up angry with the world and the demon possessed man has broken free from his chains but is still so angry that the community cannot subdue him. He is shouting at Jesus in anger and is expecting to be punished, even tortured, for the things that he has done, but Jesus doesn't shout back, fight back or give back as good as he gets. He gives back peace for anger and forgiveness for guilt! He gives back much more than he gets! The mission of Jesus is to build a new kingdom in which everyone is welcome, not one in which a privileged few feel they belong. God is making all things new and it starts with the seed of his image that is within you. We are so precious and worth so much in the eyes of our Father that he sent his Son to save us not to condemn us (John 3: 16-17). We have to be worth a lot for God to invest that much in us so our mission is to see in each other what our Creator can see. We are like oysters with pearls inside!

Our mission is to find those pearls inside the oysters so the mission of the Church today is not only to take Jesus to the nations, but to meet him in each individual and help him grow. I dare to dream of seeing Christ in others and I know he is already there, waiting to be found. We are all made in the image of God so let's recognise the good in individuals rather than fearing what we don't like because people create the divisions of religion, rich and poor or strong and weak. No-one is indispensable which is why CWM is a partnership of churches from around the world committed to sharing God's love on a journey with each other in a quest for a life of meaning and quality. This

quest is not unique to CWM because it is a desire of every human being to live with dignity and pride; to experience relationships of integrity and honesty and for each individual to feel their life has meaning and purpose. This was the mission to which Jesus committed himself, likewise it is the heartbeat of the mission of CWM with those characteristics which stand out from the crowd to be seen from a distance.

Communities do not grow by excluding the weak, the sick or the poor, creating divisions through fear and prejudice, for Christ has an equal concern for everyone whatever their wealth or health. People who feel unworthy and guilty are sent to tell the people about God's amazing grace (Isaiah 6: 5-8) and Jesus encourages a demon-possessed man to go and tell his story. He meets him where he is in all his anger and frustration and calms the storm within him so that he can be a testimony of hope for the future.

I dream of a Church, representing the Body of Christ in the world today, meeting people where they are and encouraging them to be who they can be through the Spirit of God that brings light to the chaos and darkness of life so that we can experience a new beginning! (Genesis 1: 1-3) The Spirit of God is within us, anointing us to live the good news among the poor and sending us to share the story of healing and hope. (Luke 4: 18-19) Is the Church though a reflection of the aspirations of the world, fearing that if we embrace the characteristics of Christ our hopes and visions would rush away and drown or be trampled into the ground by a stampeding herd of demons? God wants to transform our communities but when we believe we can do things in our own strength we drive Jesus out of town instead of the demons!

So I dare to dream of seeing Christ in others who can meet me where I am so that when I am angry with what I see, what I hear and how I feel I will find a visible manifestation of God encouraging me to go and tell a story that unites us as children of one family, with one Creator sharing one earthly home.

With our physical strength we can break the chains of our past; with our mental strength we can speak with knowledge but it is the spiritual strength that calms our anger, heals the wounds and helps us live the dream. I want to see Jesus in the distance so that I can run to him, fall at his feet and see my demons rushing away down a hillside to drown. Then I dream of a community welcoming the new me and listening to the story I am sent to tell!