



## **Who was that man?**

I don't know if any of you have seen re-runs of the sixties Lone Ranger series? At the end of every show some hapless bit-part player would ask: "Who was that man?" We of course knew the answer but, never-the-less, the show hinged on the ambiguity which surrounded the mysterious identity of the masked saviour...

In many ways this is the central question that Mark's Gospel is cleverly crafted to answer. Today's story of Jesus calming the storm very intentionally ends with this question – just before we see Jesus in an equally astonishing story of his encounter with the demoniac in the country of the Gerasens: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

...

Certain stories give permission for us to behave in certain ways and that is why stories are told. The story of the superiority of the British empire, for instance, shaped the way the British went about establishing that empire; as does the current story of the US bringing democracy and freedom to "lesser" nations. The same can be said of individuals.

Some years ago there was a guy involved in Chaplaincy ministry who ended up stealing from several of us and skipping town with the loot.

Soon we tracked him down and found he was doing the same thing in New Plymouth except, this time, he was taking a young solo mum for a ride. Sure enough he soon did her wrong as well before moving on. I remember discussing this with someone involved and they said, “yeah, Terry”, (not his real name), “Terry has a story about himself – hard done by, cheated by life. That *authorises* him to do what he does”.

...

So what sort of action is this story (the story of Jesus calming the storm), what sort of action is this story authorising? And what is it telling us about Jesus?

The answer is given in the kind of summary story, albeit in more overtly theological / philosophical terms, in the opening verses of John’s Gospel.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.<sup>1</sup>

Both stories (John and Mark’s), of course, reference the very first story with which the bible begins – the creation story.<sup>2</sup>

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

So here we have the same elements: God speaks and it happens. The dark chaos is effortlessly subdued and formed into something good where light shines and *life* begins.

In the story of Jesus calming the storm, as in John’s summary opening to his Gospel, the writers take this story further in their assertion that *Jesus*

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<sup>1</sup> Jn.1:1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Gen.1:1-4.

is God's Word. When *he* speaks, just as when God speaks, things happen – “even the wind and the seas obey him”, just as at the beginning.

The difference is that here Jesus is *re-forming* the creation, a creation that has somehow gone awry, into something better. Jesus expresses the power of God to *re-create*, to *redeem* – to bring the creation back to itself, to what it was created to be, to what Saint Paul tells us it *longs* to be: “set free from its bondage to decay [that it might] obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Who, then, was that man who calmed the storm? He is the very expression of God. He *is* a man. Yet he *is* God – the Lord and redeemer of creation.

And what then does this story authorize us to do? Rather than authorize us to dominate on the one hand or fear on the other, it authorizes us to hope. Why? Because it authorizes us to worship this Jesus; that is, to follow and serve him, to *trust* him, to travel with him (however leaky and vulnerable the boat may appear), and in so doing to become part of what he is doing.

***Our first reading is taken from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 8, verses 18 to 22...***

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now...

***Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church...***

***The Gospel according to Mark, chapter 4, verses 35 to 41...***

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side [of the lake]." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.

A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"

Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

***This is the Gospel of Christ!***