

Scripture for Relationology- Your story can change someone's life!

1 Peter 3:15

"Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you your reason for hope."

Ephesians 2:5-13 (MSG)

⁵ God embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us!

⁶ Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

⁷ Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish!

⁹ We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing!

¹⁰ No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

¹¹ But don't take any of this for granted. It was only yesterday that you outsiders to God's ways

¹² had no idea of any of this, didn't know the first thing about the way God works, hadn't the faintest idea of Christ. You knew nothing of that rich history of God's covenants and promises in Israel, hadn't a clue about what God was doing in the world at large.

¹³ Now because of Christ—dying that death, shedding that blood—you who were once out of it altogether are in on everything..

Relationology – Your Story Can Change Someone’s Life!

Do you consider yourself to be a believer in Jesus? A Christ-follower? See if you can relate to this story told by one of Jesus’ first followers-

It’s recorded for our benefit in Mark’s story about Jesus: so if you want to follow along with the story this morning, turn to **Mark chapter 4 verse 35-**

Mark 4:35-41 (TNIV)

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.”

Let’s note a few things here right off the bat-

- When you picture Jesus’ disciples in your mind- how old do you imagine the disciples to be? 30? 40? Middle-age? Jewish culture made it customary for a child to begin his religious training at the age of 5 and to continue to age 12 or 13. If the child showed promise and was interested in continuing their religious studies, they would then seek a rabbi to disciple them and would follow and pattern their life after the rabbi until age 30.
- In Jewish tradition, a young man began following a Rabbi between the ages of 12 and 30, and usually when he was less than 20. So that would make most of the apostles teenagers when Jesus called them to follow him.
- There are two significant things about going to “the other side”
 - One is that there was some mythology and fear about the water- the depths of the sea where it was thought that evil, darkness and chaos could reside. God in creation brought order out of this chaos, the void- but there was still some fear lurking in their minds about the depths.
 - Secondly- these young men had no doubt been raised on the stories of their faith- about how a hero named Joshua lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land where they now lived- driving out the inhabitants of the land so Israel could establish their nation there. Well- guess when some of those folks who were driven out- displaced- would up? That’s right- “on the other side...” right in the

city where Jesus was asking them to go! A boat full of young Jewish zealots would probably not be among the most welcomed people “on the other side!”

³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.

³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.

³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

This storm- and the fact that these boys were on a spiritual mission with Jesus to “the other side” were playing into the fears they already had in their minds... so the fear and concern they expressed to Jesus were very understandable- “Don’t you care if we drown Jesus?”

We didn’t want to go over to this God-forsaken place and have to deal with these people to begin with- and now who knows what is angry with us and riling up this storm in the sea and it doesn’t seem like you care Jesus! Can you relate?

Now Jesus- always looking for a memorable teaching moment- seizes the moment...

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

Jesus directly confronted their fears- spoke to the storm- and demonstrated in a most powerful way that HE ALONE was God! He just took them to school in the classroom of life!

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Jesus is challenging their thinking and preconceptions-

- Faith in Jesus is more powerful than ANY evil we face. This is critical- get this- **Jesus not waiting for them (the lost people on the other side) to come on over to our side-** no he and his followers are going to be on a mission to where they live- He's taking God into their backyard. This action displays God's grace and mercy and compassion.

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

So these young Christ-followers are beginning to really understand who Jesus is, and the nature of the mission he is preparing them for. Their life would not be one where they are cloistered away in the safe confines of a holy huddle- there would be times for that to rest and renew- but their lives would be about joining God on His mission to reach those "on the other side" with the love and story of salvation found only in Jesus.

And if you thought the scary depths of the sea were the worst part- hang on- because what happens next is even more bizarre- are you ready to see what happened next?

Mark 5:1-20 (TNIV)

¹ They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.

² When Jesus got out of the boat, **(a welcoming committee greeted him warmly and were thrilled to hear the message he had to share with them!)** a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him.

³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.

⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him.

⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

So here the young followers of Jesus survive a scare crossing the Sea of Galilee- only to pull up on shore to be greeted by a mad-man. This man is a powerful symbol of suffering and pain for them- and for us. Society had no other answer for him other than to isolate him safely outside their city walls- and to bind his hands and feet. The evil power at work in his life was so strong that he could no longer be bound even with chains- can you imagine that?

I'm sure the disciples must have been saying to themselves "What have we gotten ourselves into- this is not what I signed up for! I thought we'd be sitting around in the synagogue debating the Scriptures- not taking these "Survivor" field trips into pagan territory! Is there an escape clause in this deal we've signed with the Rabbi?

⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him.
⁷ He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!"

It's intriguing that while the young disciples are slowly recognizing who Jesus is- this tormented man immediately is aware of the true nature of who Jesus is- the Son of the Most High!

⁸ For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

Just as Jesus had spoken and the storm obeyed him- he now is demonstrating to his disciples that he has power and authority over evil- the kind of evil that seeks to isolate people, torment people, destroy people, to make their lives miserable and a living hell.

So put yourself in the disciple's shoes- you're a young adult who has decided to follow Jesus. You've got some idea of what following him could look like- but never in your wildest dreams did you image this-

But Jesus is always intentional and purposeful in his actions- just as he is in his dealings with us! Are we open to and looking for those teaching moments in our lives- when things get tough and we're not sure this is what we signed up for? Where is our faith? Are we willing to follow Jesus across the Sea and to "the other

side?” Are we willing to be God’s instruments in bringing healing, hope and Salvation to people who are far from God?

Later in the story- a crowd has gathered to see what all the fuss is about.

¹⁵ When [the crowd] came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

¹⁶ Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—

¹⁷ Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

Isn't it intriguing how the crowd responded to the healing work of Jesus? Instead of being grateful and welcoming of his power to restore broken lives- they were afraid and wanted nothing to do with Jesus- in fact- they begged him to leave!

This was another powerful teaching for the disciples- there are times when we are faithful and we share the truth and love of Jesus with others- and they won't always receive it with open arms. But even when this rejection is a very real possibility- do we shy away from telling the story of Jesus? NO!

¹⁸ As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.

Can you blame the guy- I mean your home folks bound you up in chains and cast you out of the city and left you for dead- not exactly how you'd like to be treated right? Who wouldn't want to stick real close to Jesus having experienced his love and transforming power in such a real and physical way?

If I were that man I'd be sticking real close to Jesus as staying as far away from the home folk as I could!

¹⁹ Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the LORD has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”

Let that soak in for a minute yall- This man was a reject. People were afraid of him and didn't know how to help him- so they threw him out. Can you imagine the loneliness, fear, pain and rejection he must have felt? Can you blame him for not

wanting to go back into an environment where he had been despised and rejected? Wouldn't you want to get away from there and be with the one person who took the time to stop and help you? He had tasted of the goodness of God and felt the loving, healing touch of Jesus in his life and he just wanted more of that- who wouldn't want more of THAT?!

I need for you to feel this moment with me now- because it underscores the importance of Jesus' next instruction to this man- Can you relate to his desire to stay with Jesus and avoid the people that had hurt him?

Let's read verse :19 again

¹⁹ Jesus did not let him [go with him], but said, "Go home to your own people and **tell them how much the LORD has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.**" ²⁰ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

It's normal for us as Christ-followers to want to hang out as close to Jesus as we can- it's normal for us to want to surround ourselves with others who share our love for and faith in Jesus. And there are times- like our time here in worship today that we are invited to do just that- to withdraw from the world and draw close to Jesus and his people – the Body of Christ. Jesus modeled this for his disciples as he withdrew for times of prayer and communion with God. He also spent personal time with them teaching them about life and faith.

BUT- he never let them stay there forever. He modeled for them- and God's Spirit compelled them- to leave the Holy huddle and go over to "the other side" to reach out to those who are living life far from God.

Jesus give us the exact same instruction as he did this healed and redeemed man- **"go tell others how much the LORD has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you! Make disciples of all nations!"**

You have a story to tell! In crafting your faith story- think about what your life was like before you met Christ. How did you come to know and experience Jesus? How did Jesus transform your life? And how has your life been different by

following Jesus? Not just years ago perhaps- but how is Jesus still at work in your life today? In what ways are you continuing to be transformed by Jesus?

Our faith story has the power to change lives- that's why Jesus sent the man back to his own people- not because he didn't want the man to be with him- but because he had compassion on the folks back in town and he wanted them to have a living witness in their presence about the power of the One True God!

You are that witness in your circle of influence today! Bob Farr- a faith leader in the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church, put it this way,

Our faith must be grounded in a relationship with Jesus Christ that we regularly experience in a transformative, life-giving way, and that we share with others.

Last week Pastor Dwight shared some sobering statistics with you- let me add a few more for you to consider:

About 100 years ago in our country- 80% of people were connected to God through regular church participation. 80 years ago- 65% were connecting with God through their church. In the Baby Boomer generation- fewer than 35% connect with God through active church participation. For Gen X- the number active drops to fewer than 20%. And for Millennials- fewer than 10% connect with God through a Christian church.

The "other side" is no longer just across the sea folks- it's right here in our own community!

We believe that Jesus' mission remains the same today as it was when Mark wrote his story about Jesus- that the people of God are called to go- to meet people where they are- and to tell them their story of grace and faith. We are instructed in **1 Peter 3:15** to ***Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you your reason for hope.***

Here's a great example of what we're talking about: This is from Valorie Garmon

We started attending OUMC in the fall of 2008 and officially joined the church as members in 2009. After experiencing the welcome that we did at OUMC, we began thinking about inviting some of our friends who we knew were not regular church attendees elsewhere. The environment at OUMC is relaxed and non-judgemental and I tried to take that approach when we invited our friends (Brett, Marissa & Emily Warden) to church with us. I simply just put it out there that we had been going to OUMC and really enjoyed it.

We also shared that Maddox (our son who was 3 at the time) really enjoyed the children's ministry and his time in children's church and thought that their daughter might enjoy the same. Having been friends for 25 years, I knew I could have a casual conversation with them without, hopefully, making them feel pressured to attend or that I felt like it was something they "needed". I just knew that it was something I needed in my life and wanted to share that I had found a place that filled a void in our lives and I would love for them to experience that as well.

Now at 5+ years out from that initial invite, our group of friends has grown to such that we take up a full row! The day that we, as a group, witnessed the baptism of Brett & Emily was surely one our happiest moments experienced within the walls of OUMC and we look forward to many, many more.

Through our Relationology series- we're asking you to renew your personal faith in Jesus. We're also asking you to invite others to join you here so that they too can experience God in their lives. We're asking you to reconnect to your own faith story so that you can authentically share it with others- some who might not be willing to join you in church right now- but they sit with you on the sidelines every week at the soccer field or at the dance recital or swim meet. They work next to you at the office or live next door to you in the neighborhood.

We're asking you to partner with us as your church to invite others to "God encounters"- and we have one of the most receptive seasons right upon us- Christmas to make those invitations. We're working to create several Christmas celebrations this year where you can invite your friends and family to attend- where they will have an opportunity to hear the message about Jesus.

Next week you'll be given a tool that will help you prayerfully and intentionally invite your Friends, Relatives, Associates, and Neighbors to join you at church. I hope you'll make it a priority to join us next week as we continue this important topic- one that is near and dear to Jesus' heart!

Let's pray: