



## **“Strange World”**

Pastor Andy CastroLang

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### **Scripture (CEB):**

#### **Mark 1:9-15**

<sup>9</sup> About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. <sup>10</sup> While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. <sup>11</sup> And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.”

<sup>12</sup> At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

<sup>14</sup> After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God’s good news, <sup>15</sup> saying, “Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!”

### **Sermon:**

One of my “escapes” from work and the world, is books of fantasy. Not the dystopic fantasies so popular right now, but fantasies of other worlds and ways of living and of overcoming hardship, living fully, living adventurously, living bravely.

A few years ago I was drawn in by one, *The Host*.

The author is Stephanie Meyer of “*Twilight*” fame. (Disclaimer here, I never did read that series).

In this book, which goes in a completely different direction than vampires, the aliens overcome humans without killing them. They take over the planet without devastating it. Their purpose is to live in human bodies, to experience their lives through their senses, emotions, the spirit of human beings.

And they do, they conquer humans. And it turns out, they love life on earth. They love the beauty and the diversity of the planet, and they love the beauty and the diversity of human emotion and senses. The feel of silk, the burning of the sun, the excitement of attraction to another person.

They love Italian food and Mexican food. They love falling in love, they love seeing the Grand Canyon, snorkeling, babies.

In fact, they are sometimes overwhelmed by the power of the bodies and spirits that they inhabit. That takes the story in some interesting directions! Near the end of the story, two of the aliens meet, surrounded by humans who have become their friends and all they can say to each other is, “strange world”.

Reading the book, you are made aware of the body you inhabit so comfortably, and the body you take so much for granted most of the time.

Reading the book, I was vividly reminded of the breadth and depth of the beauty of our planet, and our lives, and the beauty and diversity of the ecosystem of which we are a part.

The dirt under our feet! The countless stars in our night sky and the countless critters upon the earth! The ache of a broken heart, the hearts that burst with joy! We live in a strange and glorious world.

Now, the author of the gospel of Mark didn't know this book, but I believe the author was trying to say something powerful to us when we hear that Jesus was in the desert with the wild animals and the angels took care of him.

It is possible, in these few words, to perhaps say that Jesus was in a very different space, a very different place than “normal”.

Jesus was outside of civilization.

Jesus was outside of family and village, social and religious norms.

Jesus was outside of politics and culture, in the wild, without either.

Jesus was with the wild animals, who live by instinct, with powerful drives to live, to eat, to procreate, to protect their young, to BE.

Jesus was in the wilds where there was no one to interpret the “angels” to him, tell him to stop being foolish, no one to admonish; there is no such thing as “angels”.

There is no one there to tell him he certainly isn't special enough to merit visits by heavenly messengers.

Instead, Jesus is alone, and I imagine that he sees with new eyes.

Jesus experiences 40 days and nights of living utterly differently than “normal” people around him in Nazareth or Galilee might live. He experiences the world strangely.

There is a remaking, a reorienting of his worldview going on in the desert.

The desert beyond Jerusalem, beyond Jericho, is barren, and desolate and wild. The sun burns mercilessly by day, the sky is not merely pricked with stars, it is drenched in starlight at night.

The days are eerily quiet. There is nothing to be busy about. Water is scarce, shade from the burning sun is found in rocky caves.

It is a life changing experience, or it can be. Because nothing is as usual.

Nothing can be taken for granted. It is strange and different.

Growing up with epilepsy I thought everybody was acutely aware of their own body, everyone paid close attention to the messages of body and brain, warnings of trouble, messages to be attended to for life and safety.

No, not so.

Certainly, after my seizures stopped, my communication with my body got rusty. I got complacent.

But it isn't meant to be this way...we are not meant to be content, complacent.

In his desert time, maybe Jesus is learning that life is astonishing, rich, terrifying, immensely important.

Maybe in the wilderness all Jesus' complacency is stripped away.

Maybe in the wilderness Jesus is discovering that his life, and all life, is full of God.

And God is joy and suffering, fullness and emptiness, richness and beauty and terror, death and life.

So, when Jesus leaves the desert, the wilderness, he comes back full of that message: Now is the time. The world of God is here and now. This is good news. Look around!

This changes everything!

This motivates us to be part of a new possibility, the "kingdom of God" where everyone is wide-awake, stunned and exhilarated, and ready to turn their lives around, fill them up with living, but also scared to bits! Awed at the wonder, flat on our faces before the glory of Being.

Annie Dillard wrote that when we go to church, we shouldn't be wearing pretty hats, we should be wearing crash helmets!

Because Jesus is not asking for tame, but wild.

Jesus comes out of the desert with the wildness of the animals...so very, very alive, attuned to life and death with brilliant, blinding focus.

And

He comes out of the desert knowing that angels will minister to him wherever he goes...that indeed, angels are everywhere.

This, he practically shouts, is Good News!

This changes everything. Can you not see the wild, the glorious, the deadly, the resurrected?

Crash helmets my friends. We are called to wear crash helmets!

Living the life of a Christ follower means we live stunned with beauty, stunned by horror, stunned by grace and mercy.

There is nothing safe about this Christ life.

But it is an awake life...seeing in small things, and in vast things...the beauty of the mind of the Creator of all.

Seeing, like an alien in a new body...how amazing it is to be alive with our senses, our emotions, our souls.

Seeing, perhaps, like Jesus when he came back from the wilderness.

God is here, now, in all this fantastical life we finally have eyes to see.

God has gifted us with it. It is amazing and hard. It is rich beyond treasure. It is enough to make you weep, to make you laugh, to make you say, Thank You.

40 days and 40 nights.

Spend them wide, wide, wide awake in wonder. In thanks for the gift of your body, your brain. Your spirit, your creativity, your struggle, even your pain.

It is not an easy thing to stay awake to wonder, to be in awe day and night.

Give in to these 40 days and nights and then, let us talk on Easter morning about the way in which we live in the world.

Eyes open, amazed. Thankful for our strange and beautiful world. Giving God our thanks and glory!