

Another set of miracles

Mark 5; 1-13.

We are all aware of the Henry Rongomau Bennett Centre because the signs point to it when we visit Waikato Hospital. But do we prefer not to know what goes on there? Mental ill-health still carries a stigma. But perhaps modern miracles occur there.

Psychiatry is a modern science, and has evolved quickly as we have learned more about the human brain, and about the demons that may lurk in it. Modern psychiatry is little more than a century old, and by way of example, it is constantly changing – within living memory, medication was the primary tool, and of course it still has its place, especially in the acute phases of mental distress. But modern practice involves the use of many and varied tools. For instance, have you seen nurses leading patients around Hamilton Lake? Fresh air and exercise are 2 of the tools. So is talking. So is taking time. For the disproportionate number of Maori patients, there is increasing use of traditional cultural tools, rescues in the nick of time before they were forgotten altogether.

Not all are cured (to use the Biblical phrase), but most are eventually released into the community.

CS Lewis would rate this process as miraculous. First, there is Nature – the disturbance of the mind which St Mark describes so graphically. Then there is the intervention by Supernature – the craft of psychiatric healing, a craft which is both art and science, a hard and demanding craft which requires a bundle of skills, medical, social, and spiritual.

But we note that the demons do not die; they simply leave the man and enter a herd of pigs. Psychiatric illness may well return; it is rarely defeated utterly and permanently.

And the pigs commit the ultimate act of self-destruction. Mark is reminding us that self-harm stalks the corridors .

Please pray for all psychiatric staff both in hospitals and in the community, and please pray for those whose spirits are in Mark's words still 'unclean'.