**Teacher Resource: What does Mark 8:14-34 teach us about Hope?**

In the Bible, our world is not the only world. The biblical writers map a kind of three-decker universe. Heaven (the top layer) is God’s space, where God “is." It is where his angels are. It is the place from where God rules. Earth, the second layer, is our home. The first human’s name, “Adam,” means “the dust man” or “the earthling.” Humans are not wayward angels, lost aliens, or eternal souls temporarily encased in meat-suits. We are earthlings.

Jesus and his disciples arrive at a cemetery and encounter a man among the tombs who has been possessed by what the Gospel writer calls “an unclean spirit” (Mark 5:2). Now, apply your “map” to this scene. Where is the man? Among the tombs of the dead. What has possessed him? An unclean spirit. What is going on here? It would seem a spirit from the underworld has found its way to our world. There has been a breach at the border in our three-decked universe.

“Send us among the pigs,” the unclean spirits beg Jesus. Jesus consents and sends them there. And the pigs, now possessed by the spirits, rush headlong into the lake and are drowned. In the biblical map, such bodies of water (lakes, seas, oceans) are a kind of portal to the underworld. They are pores through which spirits can return to the underworld from which they’ve escaped. Jesus is putting things back into order: in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth.

In the modern West, we inhabit what Charles Taylor calls an “immanent frame.” We have buffered ourselves against transcendent realities, such as God and angels, or the good, the true, and the beautiful. We may or may not believe in such things—the point is we have “framed” them out, much as a picture frame includes the picture and excludes everything else. We have put transcendent realities to one side and decided to get on with life as if they weren't there. No hell below us, above us only sky.

The result? In modernity, we have more freedom than we did before. More prosperity. More opportunities to invent and reinvent who we are. We have been freed from any sense of purpose, of a telos. We do not look beyond ourselves for meaning; we generate it from within. Our identities are fluid and malleable. Spoiler alert for every Disney film since the early 1990s: “You can be who you want to be! The hero lies within you!”

But there is a sinister side. If who you are or what you become is a product of your free choices, then who you are is also your fault. You, alone, bear the entire weight of self-realization. Yes, society offers opportunities for freedom, prosperity, and agency. But we also have disturbingly high suicide rates, crippling anxiety, and experience moral apathy on a scale unknown to the ancients. Modernity has placed a burden on humanity we lack the capacity to bear.

Modernity has placed a burden on humanity we lack the capacity to bear. We were not made to generate our own meaning. We were made to be part of something bigger. Something cosmic. The three-decker universe spoke to this. It put human life in a bigger frame. It included a more complex set of assumptions and options by which to make sense of human choice—of guilt and suffering, meaning and hope. It had something to say when we bumped up against the limits of our powers, the curtailments of our creatureliness. Modernity looks down over thick-rimmed reading glasses and says, “Well, maybe if you’d tried harder . . .” The ancient, transcendent view was more expansive. It had room for us to understand ourselves as simultaneously victims and perpetrators, noble and base, free and enslaved, responsible and in need of rescue. We were made for more than modernity can deliver. Human life needs a bigger canvas that the one we have been given