

Feb 4 2024 sermon

Still in Mark's gospel this week in fact still in the first chapter of Mark. Already we are becoming aware of a characteristic of Mark's telling the story of Jesus - short sharp breathless scenes where Jesus is presented as the Man of Authority. In Mark things are always happening "immediately", "at once" he piles up repeated uses of "and" "and" - a sense of urgency pervades the gospel for the Reign of God is even now breaking in and the only sensible response is to "Repent! and believe the Good News".

Mark repeatedly indicates that "proclaiming" or "preaching" for Jesus goes beyond words but includes powerful deeds - his exorcisms, healings, and legal controversies. It involves all the ways in which he makes God's reign (or "kingdom," as traditionally translated) known and observable. This what it means to teach with authority. So Mark sees Jesus healing Peter's mother in law as part of his proclamation of the gospel.

Today's reading continues to track the opening days of Jesus' burst onto the scene, startling the crowds and sending demons scurrying. Setting imp in Mark - last week it was the sabbath in synagogue, holy place and holy time; and as if not enough happened in last week teaching and exorcism in the synagogue we are still in that same day - verse 29 As soon as they left the synagogue remember it is a sabbath so these mighty acts would have been frowned upon by the religious authorities.

on this memorable day we get three stories...one public (synagogue), one personal in Peter's home), and one private as Jesus goes alone to the wilderness

Both last week and this week mentions unclean spirits.

In Mark there is much discussion yet confusion about Jesus' true identity but there is one group who have particular insight - and that is the evil or unclean spirits. They are presented as having intimate knowledge of the spiritual realm and so can name Jesus perhaps as an attempt to gain control over him. These unclean spirits are encroaching upon God's good creation - binding people through disease, illness, death - even a slavish legalistic law adherence could be interpreted as an expression of these malevolent powers. No coincidence this early story is a confrontation. It is the opening skirmish in what is a cosmic apocalyptic battle. In Jesus God is claiming back that which has fallen under the power of evil. Jesus offers no compromise- Last week we heard, have you come to destroy us? The unclean spirit says. Yes! There are 3 mentions of Jesus driving out the unclean spirits today and four exorcisms in Mark's gospel and they are presented as the Man of Authority striding into this world with the full authority of the Divine in order to throw back the powers that have overstepped their place in creation.

Jesus heals Peter's mother in law... come again? Mother in law... that means Peter.... had a wife. Who was she, why do we never hear about her. But did not Peter leave his boat and his nets and follow Jesus. What about his wife and kids if there were any?

Jesus takes her hand and lifts/raises her

“The fever left her, and she began to serve them.” I am very aware of the potential for gender stereotyping here. A woman, temporarily unwell, back to health so now she can get on with her domestic duties of looking after, what was probably the men. She returns to her role, as a woman, she resumed her role, she returned to her “place.”

- word can also be translated as the word we know as, Deacon. We needn't think it is a structural, fixed sexist stereotyping though as J refers to himself as one who came not to be served but to serve.

But we do need to shift the gender role stereotyping and embrace the idea that anyone who is healed, or who is touched by Jesus, quite naturally and even spontaneously begins to serve others. It was in person, face to face. She worked with her own hands, and served and shared time with real people.

Torak Uniting as part of Toorak Ecumenical Council make a donation each year to the work of CCS and last time around beginning of December person coming over and after dropped of food said, “Is this the best way to do this. We have the money which I then go and make the purchase and then bring over here. We could just transfer the money through a direct electronic transfer. But it somehow does not seem very personal. I love coming over here and seeing what you do and meeting the staff. Yeah absolutely I said. Let's in fact get a photo of today and you go back and show it to the congregation. “Better to deliver aid than to send it,” as John Wesley pointed out.

And now there is a pile on Wave of human need, mass of humanity and need, whole town at his door! Evokes for me the scene in JC Superstar where the swarming, needy, desperate, writhing together in a swarming mass of desperate humanity. They cling to Jesus, dragging him down, clawing at him, pleading, demanding, draining him. What's the The never ending, bottomless pit of human suffering.

“See my eyes I can hardly see my purse, I'm a poor, poor man. I believe you can make me well.”

Jesus, although He is clearly uncomfortable, says nothing. “There's too many of you; there's too little of me. Heal yourselves!”

Jesus flees the crowd and the adulation that comes from his thus far success full ministry.

There is a “Take Time to be Holy” moment here: Jesus, the Messiah, with the sick clamoring for him, with demons to cast out, with teachings to reveal, rose in the morning, while it was still dark, and went to a deserted place. I'm also intrigued that “they hunted for him.” Only time word used in NT - could be translated searched for, looked for, or strong, pursued or hunted for. Jesus, can't catch a break and get some space! Feels like ministry.

***Even youths will faint and be weary.
And the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint. J tries to find quiet time - crowd "hunted him" -
desperate crowds***

To his advisors, Jesus said, "Let's head in the other direction, to nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That's why I've come." Sounds to me he had the kind of clarity that comes out of one's deepest identity which finds its source and sustenance in God.

It's not that Jesus realized he had wasted his time curing and casting out, but that these public acts were going to severely limit him from other aspects of his ministry. He tells the disciples as much when he says, "Let's go so that I can proclaim the message to others, for that is what I came to do."

Jesus could remain at a single location, being a wonder healer, there would be more than enough demand for his services. But his vocation, ministry is to proclaim in both word and deed the coming of the Kingdom. He must be on the move.

See my eyes, I can hardly see
See me stand, I can hardly walk
I believe you can make me whole
See my tongue, I can hardly talk
See my skin, I'm a mass of blood
See my legs, I can hardly stand
I believe you can make me well
See my purse, I'm a poor poor man
Will you touch, will you mend me,
Christ?
Won't you touch, will you heal me,
Christ?
Will you kiss, you can cure me,
Christ?
Won't you kiss, won't you pay me,
Christ?

[JESUS]
Ooo There's too many of you; don't
push me
There's too little of me; don't-don't
crowd me
Mmm, don't crowd me
Oww, Ohhh
Heal yourselves!