

“More than a Healer”

Mark 1: 29-34, (35-39)

The Gospel of Mark tells us that immediately after calling his first disciples, Jesus went with them into the city of Capernaum. When the Sabbath came, he went into the synagogue and began to teach. When a man who is filled with an evil spirit rudely interrupts, Jesus rebukes the spirit and orders it to come out of the man ... and he is healed. *“What is this?” the people asked one another in amazement. “A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to the evil spirits and they obey him!”*

The whole region of Galilee is talking about it -- and more astonishing things are yet to come. That very same day, Jesus enters the home of a woman who is so sick with fever that she can't get out of bed. He takes her hand, lifts her up ... and she is healed. Word of her recovery quickly spreads from person to person, from house to house. By night-fall, *every* sick and troubled person in Capernaum is camping out in the yard at Peter's house, the place where Jesus was staying.

They are there because they hope Jesus will do for them what he did for Peter's mother-in-law -- and Jesus does not disappoint them. He heals many of their illness and casts out many demons. This goes on until late at night, until – at last – the household is able to settle down and get some rest.

It had been a day unlike anyone had ever experienced before. But Mark says something odd – namely, that Jesus prevents those cast-out demons from speaking “because they knew him.” In other words, he does not want them to identify him. Even though what Jesus does is truly spectacular, he tries to keep it quiet.

We can rightly assume that the demons intend no good for Jesus; they recognize him as the one appointed for their ultimate defeat and destruction. It is entirely understandable that Jesus would forbid them from speaking. But as we will discover as we continue reading in Mark, there are many occasions when Jesus also warns *people* – not just demons – to say nothing about the miracles he has performed. He seems intent on avoiding publicity ... and we are left to wonder why.

ONE possible reason, is to maintain a certain degree of privacy. Despite his wishes, the time would soon come when great crowds would gather around Jesus wherever he went.

Some years ago when our family was living in Utah, I had just finished some grocery shopping and was getting into my car when I saw a little commotion over in the next parking lane. It was a cluster of people, gathered around an older gentleman with a loaded grocery cart. He was smiling, but he also seemed to be uncomfortable. He kept glancing at his cart and seemed to be trying to edge away from the group. And then I looked more closely at his face and realized what was going on. That gentleman was the famous actor Wilford Brimley, who – I knew – had a horse ranch a few miles away. And there he was, surrounded by admirers, when all he wanted to do was get home before his ice cream melted.

Is that the reason Jesus wanted to remain anonymous? Like rock stars who wear dark glasses and plain clothing, in the hopes that no one will recognize them? That may be part of it ... but Charles Hoffacker says that “this theme in the gospels, known as the messianic secret, is so significant that ‘crowd control’ cannot begin to explain it. Something more is happening here.”

It shortly becomes clear that Jesus does not want to be identified simply as someone who heals the sick and casts out the demons that cause so much havoc in human life. That he DOES heal and cast out demons is very important – a sign that the reign of God is near – but it is not what is MOST important.

Let’s turn now to the rest of our passage, Mark 1 verse 35.

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” When they realized Jesus was gone, *“Simon and his companions went to look for him.”* It’s interesting to note that Mark doesn’t call them disciples. There may be a very good reason for that: at this point, they aren’t acting like disciples at all.

In his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, Gary Charles says that most translators are gentle with Peter and his friends when they translate *katadioko* as “searched for,” “looked for” or “went after.” But, he goes on, that misses the usual intense, almost hostile sense of this verb. They are not merely *looking* for Jesus; rather, they have gone “on the hunt.” They mean to find their quarry and bring him back.

“And when they found him, they exclaimed, ‘Everyone is looking for you!’” Implicit in this, is that Simon and his companions “know” what Jesus should be doing, and it is NOT sitting in solitude and prayer. Anxious crowds of hurting people are waiting for him back in Capernaum ... and, not incidentally, they are all camped out at Peter’s house!

“But Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages -- so that I may preach there also; for that is why I have come.’ And he traveled throughout the Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.” This is the Word of the Lord.

What Jesus literally said was, “Let us go another way.”

Literally, and figuratively, Jesus intended to take them on a different path.

The four friends -- Simon and Andrew, James and John – must have been disappointed to hear that Jesus wasn’t going to go back and finish healing people in their own hometown of Capernaum. Disappointed, and perhaps puzzled. Why not go back, where he had made such a good start? After all, people there already knew him as a powerful teacher and healer. But over time, they saw him travel from place to place, reaching more and more people with his message about the coming kingdom. And some of them, at least, began to think they understood what he was doing – that he was “expanding his base.”

But they didn’t, of course; didn’t really understand. It would have been logical, from a human perspective, for Jesus to use his wide-spread popularity and charisma to gather an army to fight against Rome. Or, if not a rebellion, to perform mighty miracles to cast out the occupying military forces and restore Israel as a free and independent nation such as it had been in the days of King David. That’s what they expected of God’s messiah.

How often we look to Jesus, and we want him to DO things that from our human perspective seems so logical.

But Jesus said – to those first followers, and to us – “Let us go another way.”

You and I, we know the rest of the story. Yes, Jesus came to heal. But he was more than a healer ... more than a teacher ... more than an earthly king. His life, his teaching, even his healing, can only be understood in light of his death and his resurrection.

He came to proclaim and to accomplish the fulfillment of God’s promises. To heal and to free us in ways that extend beyond human wisdom and beyond our earthly life.

He not only came THEN, but he is here NOW, calling us to lay aside our worldly priorities and “go another way.” Jesus calls us to be his partners in extending God’s kingdom, right now and right here on earth. Both teaching and healing. Not only talking about it, but living it out. That’s how we know the kingdom of God is real: We can see the Kingdom in action all around us.

God's kingdom is present whenever people pray the way Jesus taught us to pray. It is present whenever Jesus nurtures certain attitudes and lifestyles that we call Fruit of the Spirit. It is present wherever a believer refuses to go along with some scheme that she believes is untruthful, and that to participate would be dishonoring to Jesus.

The kingdom is present whenever and wherever a believer refuses to act selfishly, whenever or wherever a kindly woman speaks a word of peace and compassion to a lonely neighbor. It is present whenever someone packs a backpack full of healthy snacks, or delivers meals or drives someone to a doctor's appointment, or picks up their toolbox to go build a ramp, or repair a porch, or fix a leaky faucet.

It is present whenever a husband or wife or young person or an employer or employee resists their inclination to blast someone else with harsh and critical words. It is present whenever a believer refuses to listen to gossip or inflammatory or demeaning remarks that tend to pit one group against another.

The kingdom is present whenever acts of kindness and service and honesty and integrity are done, not because WE have decided to be "nice" or "good," but because Jesus has chosen us and called us and places his Spirit within us in order that we may live and love and serve in ways that reveal HIS power and Lordship.

And so we pray ... and so we live: "Let Thy kingdom come, and Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Amen?

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Transition to the Lord's Supper

Remember to explain how to open the individual serving cup