

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing©

Mark 1:29-39

February 4, 2018

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Here we are in the very beginning of Jesus' ministry – according to Mark. It moves fast and sometimes it seems a little hard to keep up. We've already talked the last two Sunday's about Mark's use of the word "immediately." He uses it a lot. Everything seems immediate to Mark.

But scholars believe that the author of the gospel of Mark was writing in 64 CE. That is 64 years in the Common Era. 64 years after Christ's birth. And in that year, there was a terrible fire in Rome that took six days to put out. It destroyed so much of the city – including some of the Emperor, Nero's, own palace. Christians were blamed and persecuted for that fire.

So, that may be the reason for the sense of urgency in Mark. It was an urgent message to believe and to drop everything and follow Jesus. Mark's gospel is an apocalyptic gospel – meaning there was much belief that Jesus' second coming was coming very soon. Drop what you're doing and follow. There isn't much time. The kingdom of God is coming and will save the day.

So, Jesus burst in on the scene (in Mark) being baptized by John the Baptist and very quickly being sent into the wilderness to be tempted. When he comes back, he proclaims the good news saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

Last week we heard that Jesus was in the synagogue teaching and really knocked their socks off with the authority they heard from him. And we heard that he healed a man with an unclean spirit – a demon. We heard that this demon was really the only one who recognized Jesus. Others did not yet know who he was.

But in this passage today, Jesus immediately goes on to Simon Peter's house. We wonder sometimes about the disciples who dropped their nets (Simon Peter included) to follow this itinerate preacher. Just dropped everything and immediately followed him. By dropping everything, does that mean they dropped their families? Their homes? Just left them to fend for themselves? We did read that James and John left their father, Zebedee, in the fishing boat with their hired hand to follow Jesus.

But in this story, Jesus and these disciples who have left their jobs and family to follow him, go to Simon Peter's house. His house where his mother-in-law lives. So, more than likely, so does Simon Peter's wife, as well. And they live in Capernaum in Galilee where Jesus does much of his ministry. I'm thinking Jesus was probably a guest of Simon Peter and his family numerous times.

The first thing Jesus does is go to Simon's mother-in-law who has a high fever and is very seriously ill. And he heals her. He heals her so completely that she gets out of bed and is able to help serve all the guests.

Then, in the evening, when the Sabbath is over (which is around 6 p.m. or, according to how they kept time, when three stars appeared in the sky) people began bringing the sick and the demon possessed to Jesus to be healed.

And all through the evening and into the night Jesus healed. And he commanded the demons who, like the one in the synagogue, knew who he was, to not even speak. He needed time to do his ministry before his identity got out all over the countryside.

And finally, day one of his ministry was over, and he was tired to the bone. The crowd dwindled and early in the morning Jesus slipped away, trying to find a place to be alone. A place for himself to be renewed.

Mark is comical in his descriptions of Jesus's attempts to be alone. It hardly ever happened, even though he tried. In fact, this is only one of three times in the gospel of Mark where Jesus can be alone. He was alone once on a mountain to pray and again in the Garden of Gethsemane.

It is comical where, in Mark 4, he says "...when Jesus was alone, those who were with him, along with the twelve, asked him about the parables ..." Um, that doesn't sound like he was alone at all, does it?

Yet, he tried because he knew when we give a lot of ourselves for others – for the ministry or for the good of other people – it is very important to take some time to be replenished. If we are a vessel for God to use, where love and healing and grace pour out of us, we have to replenish the reservoir where it has all come from. So, there will be more to give.

But his renewal time was short-lived because the disciples found him and told him to come back to the house. There were more people waiting for him; more who needed him to heal. He was now, after one day, in great demand.

He could have stayed, you know. Made a nice little life for himself. Maybe decided to take the easy road – even if it was exhausting. He could have had a home, maybe a family, and been in high esteem with so many people in awe of his healing.

He could have decided right then and there that maybe he would take a different path and not go on the preaching tour; not deal with huge crowds of strangers in different villages every day. He could have maybe decided to not take the road to the cross after all.

I mean, the disciples were always trying to convince him that he was wrong about that cross. They didn't get that first shall be last and last shall be first jargon. They didn't understand that it was Jesus' will that had to be followed, not theirs.

They tried to get him to send the crowd away to eat, that time when he was preaching on the mountain. But, Jesus intended on feeding them. All 5,000 plus of them.

They try to distance the children from him, when he said to bring them to him.

Jesus was certainly misunderstood. His preaching and teaching. His identity. It took time. And Mark runs us through it awfully fast.

So, Jesus tells the disciples they are not going back to Capernaum but that he has to move on to the next village. To proclaim the gospel. To preach the good news. "For that is what I came out to do." He said.

I titled this sermon *Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing*, which apparently caused a little confusion for the Bible Study this past week, which I could not attend. I received some texts messages asking me about it.

So, I want to ask you – either you who were at Bible Study, or any of the rest of you – what do you think the Main Thing is?

TIME FOR ANSWERS

If the main thing is, as Jesus said, to proclaim the message (also meaning the gospel, or the good news), then what exactly is that message?

ANSWERS?

We know that when Jesus, the day before, started his ministry, he proclaimed that '*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.*' Mark 1:15

The kingdom of God has come near, because the Son of God has entered the world and is here now. And is changing lives and healing the sick and the broken; he is offering forgiveness and salvation and grace.

That's the gospel message. That's the good news we love. That seems like it is the Main Thing to me.

But, the thing is, Jesus goes on to the next town and he heals a man with leprosy. And he goes on and on, healing people and cleansing people of evil spirits. He forgives sinners and he shows love to the "so called unlovable." He gives hope for the poor.

But in Mark, we don't really hear him saying any of those gospel words that he says he has to go preach. In fact, when he heals people, he tells them not to go tell others. For them not to proclaim this good news.

Why? Well, because when the word gets out, people start after him and it becomes very difficult to do his job for very long. The attention gets to the temple leaders – those "other" authorities who have the power to shut Jesus' down for good. And Jesus needs time. And of course, we know that the people he healed could not keep quiet and the authorities did come after him. And it all really did seem, as Mark likes to say, "immediate."

So, it looks like Jesus' idea of proclaiming the good news message of healing and transformation, of forgiveness and new life is to do it with actions and deeds more than words, doesn't it?

Jesus announced the good news – the kingdom has come near now - when he first began his ministry and most of it after that was shown in what he did. His very life was a proclamation of the good news.

And that, my friends, is the Main Thing.

Saint Francis of Assisi put it so very well when he said, "Preach the Gospel at all times and, when necessary, use words."

The best way for us disciples who want to model ourselves after the Savior we follow, who is Christ Jesus, is to do as he did. Live the gospel. Don't preach so much in words as you do in

your life and in your love and ministry to others. Show kindness and gentleness; be forgiving and loving; help the poor and the sick; let the love and light of Christ shine through you.

There will times and opportunities for using words to say why you do what you do. But the best message is to keep the Main Thing the Main Thing, don't you agree? By how you live and how you love. But truly do it.

“Preach the Gospel at all times and, when necessary, use words.” That's the Main Thing.

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