

Pastor Joe Polzin
Mark 1:29-39
“Why Jesus Came to Us”
Year B – The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 4, 2018

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Picking up on the heels of our Gospel reading last week, Jesus continues the fast-paced start to his ministry. Think about all that’s happened in this first chapter of Mark’s Gospel. In a relatively short time, John has prepared the way for Jesus, Jesus has been baptized, he was tempted in the wilderness by the devil, he’s called his first disciples, and as we heard last week, he began to teach in the synagogue.

It was there, that day, when he encountered spiritual opposition, an unclean spirit, whom Jesus silenced and ordered out of the man he possessed. And all were amazed at his teaching, but also at his authority, that he could command even the spirits to obey. They hadn’t heard or seen anything like this before. “And at once,” Mark tells us, “his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee” (1:28).

Which is where our Gospel reading picks up today. *Immediately*, Mark says again, showing us the quick succession of these events, immediately Jesus left the synagogue where he had demonstrated his authority, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, who were brothers, and James and John were there, as well. We know that Simon Peter was married, because it was his mother-in-law who was ill with a fever. Of course, any fever in that day would have been serious and life-threatening.

And upon hearing about her illness, without saying anything, it seems, Jesus walks over to her, takes her hand, lifts her up off the bed, and she was healed, restored by Jesus. And she began to minister to Jesus and his disciples.

That very evening, which would have been the end of the Sabbath rest, people had time to react to the fame of Jesus, which was spreading. They began to bring their ailing loved ones to Jesus. And it’s fascinating how Mark describes it so vividly, “The whole city,” he says, “was gathered together at the door” (1:33). And Jesus healed them.

Think about what that would have been like, to be a local in that town. Imagine a man named Jesus showing up rather suddenly in our town, and you hear that he’s staying at a particular house. And you had heard that he was healing all sorts of diseases and oppressions. Can you think of someone you would bring to him? Would you have something to ask of Jesus? It wouldn’t take long for Jesus to show up on every newspaper and TV, local, state-wide, even national news. How far do you think people would travel just to gather at his door?

Which is why, what Jesus does next, begins to show us that Jesus did not come as a miracle worker seeking power. He did not come to be a smooth-talking demagogue either. Nor did he come to amass earthly influence to overthrow earthly authorities. If he had, his ministry would have looked entirely different.

Instead, and we may overlook this sometimes, Jesus would often withdraw from the fame that followed him, because he knew the attention he received would lead him to things for which he did not come. That’s even why twice in this chapter, Mark notes that Jesus goes so far as to silence the demons, because *they* knew who he was (1:25, 34). But it wasn’t time yet for everyone else to know.

When we hear Mark describe the beginning of Jesus' ministry as these glorious, powerful, and fast-paced events, we might expect Jesus to be gearing up for some earthly crusade, ready for his big breakout moment the next morning. Instead, what we see from Jesus is quite different. It's secretive. It's even a little awkward.

Instead of making himself available for the crowds, so that he could continue his take-down of demons and diseases, Jesus awakes the next morning while it was still dark, and he goes out to a desolate place, and he prays. He connects with his Father, and reaffirms what he's come to do. Meanwhile, no one knew where he was, and it seems that's just what Jesus intended.

Finally, it was Simon Peter who found him. Can you imagine his confusion? Simon said, "Everyone is looking for you!" He would have wanted Jesus to come back to the house and pick up where he left off the day before. But Jesus, instead of going back with Simon, said, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, *for that is why I came out.*"

"*For that is why I came out.*" To preach. Jesus' main objective was not to do miracles. It was to teach, and to tell people of the good news, the reason why he came. Yes, Jesus would continue to heal and cast out demons, and do many miracles. When God walks the earth, beginning to establish his reign and rule, you can expect some amazing things begin to happen. But the miracles were done in service to his *message*, not the other way around.

Jesus certainly didn't fulfill the expectations of his disciples, or the crowds, or even the devil himself. The devil thought he could sidetrack Jesus by tempting him with a taste of worldly glory. But Jesus patiently demonstrated that the Savior hadn't come to achieve success as the world sees it. Instead, he demonstrated that the Savior had come to deliver the good news that the kingdom of God Himself was being established by and through him.

And in order to do that, something much greater was on the horizon. A time when the debt of sin, and the deadly wages of that sin, would be paid by Jesus. That the true eternal affliction of the human race, not just a single disease, was about to be powerfully healed by his life, and his death, and his resurrection.

Jesus' first words half a chapter back were, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel" (1:15). Jesus' focus was on something larger than what we could have seen at the time. His focus was on what it would take to forgive our sins and save us, truly save us.

Which meant that, when the time came for Jesus to be hung on a cross, and some were mocking him, saying, "Save yourself, and come down from the cross!" (15:30), he chose not to do a final miracle, even though he could. He remained still and silent.

If the only purpose of his coming had been to demonstrate his earthly power, he *could have* appealed to his Father, as he said, who would have at once sent him more than twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:53). But that's *not* why Jesus came. He had come to demonstrate his *eternal* power, power that in the eyes of man seemed weak, but in the eyes of God was the very power to save the whole world, including you and me.

It becomes painfully apparent, throughout the Gospels, that no one understood why Jesus had come. Not even his disciples. And it wasn't until after Jesus was raised from the dead that his disciples began to understand. They realized that their expectations of Jesus had been too shallow. But once their hearts and minds were opened to the true power that Christ demonstrated, and his powerful proclamation of why he had come, *they* would be the ones who began to preach. *They* would be the ones who would give up everything in *this* world, even their own lives, in order to bring the Word of Christ to the very ends of the earth. And though they

would share that Jesus did not fulfill any of *their* preconceived expectations, they would proclaim that what he did through his death and resurrection was far greater.

What about when it comes to us? What expectations do we have of Jesus in our lives? When we think about what kind of Savior we expect him to be for us, what is it we think of?

One way we can tell, perhaps, is to look at our prayers. What are we sharing with God in the quiet meditations of our hearts and minds? Is it a laundry list of things we'd like Him to do for us? Are we like the crowds in Capernaum, and only bringing Jesus our sick and our afflicted?

Don't get me wrong, when we or our loved ones face the hardships of body and mind, we certainly *should* turn to Jesus in prayer, even asking for His healing intervention. There are many requests having to do with the material things of this world for which it is good to pray – our healing and health, our safety and protection, our jobs and finances. I'm sure some prayers will even be offered today on behalf of both Super Bowl teams. Praying for these things isn't wrong; well, most of those things... But is that *all* we do? Do our expectations of Jesus stop there? Have we limited our Savior in our minds to be only a simple miracle-worker?

Let us not forget, that though Jesus healed many people through miracles, and did so out of his true compassion for us as he saw many who were suffering in this fallen world, those miracles served the ministry of his Word, not the other way around. Jesus came for more than simply healing our fevers, or cancers, or chronic pain. Jesus came to heal the fever of our mortal life, the cancer of our sin, and the chronic pain of having to face an eternity separated from God. And what he accomplished on our behalf reverses all of that. And though for a short time, we may still be afflicted in this world, we look forward to the day when Jesus will return, and we will fully know the vast rewards that our Savior has secured for us.

Recognizing that Jesus far exceeds any of our preconceived expectations, our prayer lives should reflect this truth, as well. So, while we can pray for our concerns in this body and life, let us also pray in thanksgiving for all that God has done, praising Him for who He is. Let us pray for the growth of Christ's Church, and that certain people we know would believe in Jesus. Let us pray for others doing the right things and making wise choices. Let us pray about our repentance, or resisting temptation, that we would recognize the danger of sin, and ask to be led down good paths. Let us pray for stronger devotional lives, more time for prayers, and clarity of thought about the Scriptures. And let us pray looking forward to our eternal home with God, being assured of all that Jesus has done to secure that future.

When we realize the enormity of the Gospel, the enormity of all that Jesus has done for us as our Savior, it broadens the view of our whole life, and what it means that we walk with God. We cherish the Word that our Savior has proclaimed, the Word that assures us we are forgiven and saved. That Word that Jesus preached, the reason why he came to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.