

“Called to Share Our Faith”

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 40: 21-31

Mark 1: 29-39

Feb. 4 2018

Called by God—Part 4 “Called to Share Our Faith”

The Gospel of Mark is arguably the most intense of all four gospels. Not because it has the most action scenes or is more suspenseful than the others. Rather, Mark seems to have no interest in subtlety. He makes no effort, really, to describe or set up the scenes, or to transition smoothly from one story to the next.

His interest is simple—get the story out! Tell the Good News, which is too important to be cluttered with anything other than the bare essentials.

Which is why Mark is the shortest of the gospels—by far. But boy... Mark is packed.

I mean, here we are nine weeks into a new liturgical year focusing on Mark’s gospel—NINE WEEKS—but we’re still reading from the first chapter.

So let’s quickly step back, and see just how much has happened between last week and this week’s lessons.

After calling his first disciples, Jesus heads off for a town called Capernaum. When he gets there, he goes to a synagogue and begins teaching and preaching. And after healing a man who was suffering from an unclean spirit—which was a VERY big deal—Jesus then goes to the home of a disciple’s mother-in-law. Except, the mother-in-law is sick. Really sick. So Jesus reaches out, takes her by the hand, and heals her. Actually, the Greek says Jesus raises her up. Meaning... he gives her new life. And as word spreads about this miracle-maker, folks all across town begin bringing those who are sick or in need to Jesus hoping he could heal them. And he does. Mark says Jesus cured the lot of them.

The next morning, undoubtedly tired from a whirlwind couple of days, Jesus goes off in search of seclusion and devotion time with God. But the disciples find him all too quickly, and let him know how excited everybody is that he’s in their town. “You’re like a rock star!” they say. “Come on, Jesus. Check it out!”

Except... Jesus isn’t headed back to Capernaum. At least not yet. “We’re not going back there. We’ve gotta keep moving. There are lots more towns to visit so I can proclaim the message there, too; for that’s what I’m here to do,” he says. “Proclaim the Kingdom of God.”

To all of this, Mark simply adds, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.”

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Whew. All that... all that... in just 18 verses in the first chapter.

So heads up, folks. For the rest of this year, as we spend time exploring Mark’s gospel, we’ll be exploring a Gospel of *movement*. A Gospel in which the Good News of Jesus Christ refuses to stand still, but insists on moving from beginning to end. From town to town. From person to person.

And yet... this movement of the Gospel... this movement of God's kingdom isn't simply that of Jesus' feet... the movement from one place to another. There's another kind of movement going on throughout all of this. Did you spot it?

In the synagogue, Jesus initially proclaims his message through teaching and preaching about the kingdom of God. But when a suffering man interrupts him, there's a sudden movement from preaching to healing... from teaching to making a broken man whole. Jesus moves from speaking about the kingdom of God to demonstrating the kingdom of God with his hands.

Then, as Jesus goes to Simon and Andrew's house and heals their mother-in-law... and then all the townsfolk... and they all want Jesus to stay in their town... there comes yet another movement. Jesus says he can't stay in one town, but must move on in order to proclaim the Good news of God's kingdom in other places as well... marking a shift, this time, from healing with his hands back to preaching and teaching with his words.

It's a movement throughout Jesus ministry. From proclaiming the Good News of God's kingdom with your voice... to proclaiming the Good News with your actions. Both are essential, Mark says. Our words as well as our deeds. One part by itself is not enough. They need to support each other.

For the truth is... we can't say that we—as a church—believe in the love of God if we don't show it and share it. We can't say we believe God loves God's creation, and then turn our backs on it. Just as we can't say that the body of Christ includes those who are like us and those who aren't, and then condemn those who we don't understand or those we disagree with or those who may not bear a proper citizenship.

What we say must be reflected in what we do.

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Of course, I realize that talking about the integrity between our words and our actions isn't anything that hasn't been preached in this pulpit many times before, and undoubtedly many times still to come.

And the truth is, Towson Presbyterian, I think we here at TPC do a pretty darn good job of acting out the faith we claim. There's certainly room to grow... but we're trying, and growing... and doing our best along the way.

What I think we struggle with, on the other hand, is what most mainline churches today struggle with. Not our actions so much... but our words. Using our voice to proclaim the faith that has come to mean so much to us.

It's like the beautiful hymn, "*And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.*" But as the author Martha Grace Reese once wrote... if all we are is loving with our deeds and not with our words, people who don't know the story of Jesus Christ will simply think we're really nice people. They won't know why—why we're filled with love. Why we *want* to give. Why our lives seem... somehow... transformed.

Remember, the movement of the gospel isn't just words to actions... it's also actions back to words. Meaning... if we want to truly proclaim the Kingdom of God on earth... if we

want to be vessels of the Good News of Jesus Christ... we have to talk about our faith. And that, I think... that is quite possibly the scariest thing we can think of when it comes to what God calls us to do.

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It's certainly a fear I know well. I remember when I applied to seminary as a senior in college. All my friends knew that, as a Psych. Major, I was applying to clinical psychology graduate programs. What I only told a few of my closest friends was that I was also applying to seminary. 'Cause frankly, I was flat-out uncomfortable talking about my faith with most folks. The only people I'd really ever talked about faith with were people either in my family or at my church.

But by springtime of my senior year, when the acceptance letters finally arrived and I decided to actually give seminary a whirl, word eventually got out. And as word spread throughout my fraternity—my fraternity where I had been that stereotypical fraternity guy—friends would come up and say, “Rob, are you really going to *seminary*???” They were stunned. Now, most would also give me a hug and a “Congratulations,” because they were happy for me. But make no mistake, they were stunned. And for good reason! Here I was, about to head off for seminary, and they had never heard me talk about my faith before. Not once. I'd known many of them for three or four years by then, yet most of them had no clue how big a role my faith played in my life... because I never talked about my faith.

How's that for a lack of integrity? My faith was important enough for me to enroll in seminary... but not important enough for me to share with my buddies? That's how uncomfortable I was talking about my faith.

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Do we have that integrity, TPC? Do we share our faith in both word and deed? Do our friends know the role faith plays in our lives? Do those we're close with know why we do what we do? Why we give what we give? Why we live the way we live?

It's not that we should be interested in converting people to a right religion or our way of thinking because we've got it “right.” But the Good News has to be both seen and heard to be truly shared. And if what we proclaim here each week truly does matter to us... if it is central to who we are... and who we're becoming... if we believe that the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ not only transforms us but can also transform the world... then friends, we cannot deny that we are all—each and all—called to share our faith—in words and deeds.

As Mark makes clear, the Kingdom of God is on the move. Moving in this world between the words and actions of disciples today. Look close, and you'll see it at Christ's table in just a bit. The movement we experience every time we experience bread broken... and a cup poured out. Every time we hear the words, “This is the bread of life.” “This is the cup of salvation.”

It's the kingdom of God in word and deed... let us proclaim it. Amen.