

“ONE AMAZING DAY”

**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK (1:21-28)
AND PRESENTED AT ORLEAN UMC ON FEBRUARY 1,2015**

**ON A COLD JANUARY MORNING A FEW YEARS BACK, A
MAN IN A BASEBALL CAP STOOD IN THE BUSTLING
CORRIDOR OF A METRO STATION IN WASHINGTON DC.
HE OPENED UP A VIOLIN CASE AND STARTED TO PLAY.**

**HE PLAYED SIX PIECES OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
FOR ABOUT 45 MINUTES..... DURING THAT TIME, SINCE
IT WAS RUSH HOUR, IT WAS CALCULATED THAT
THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WENT THROUGH THE STATION,
MOST OF THEM ON THEIR MORNING COMMUTE.**

THREE MINUTES WENT BY AND A MIDDLE-AGED MAN NOTICED THERE WAS MUSICIAN PLAYING..... HE SLOWED HIS PACE AND STOPPED FOR A FEW SECONDS AND THEN HURRIED UP TO MEET HIS SCHEDULE..... A MINUTE LATER, THE VIOLINIST RECEIVED HIS FIRST DOLLAR TIP: A WOMAN THREW THE MONEY IN THE TILL AND WITHOUT STOPPING CONTINUED TO WALK..... A FEW MINUTES LATER, A MAN LEANED AGAINST THE WALL TO LISTEN TO HIM, BUT THEN HE LOOKED AT HIS WATCH AND STARTED TO WALK AGAIN..... CLEARLY HE WAS LATE FOR WORK.

THE ONE WHO PAID THE MOST ATTENTION WAS A THREE YEAR-OLD BOY. HIS MOTHER HURRIED HIM ALONG, BUT THE BOY STOPPED TO LOOK BACK AT THE VIOLINIST.

FINALLY THE MOTHER PUSHED A LITTLE HARDER THAN USUAL AND THE CHILD CONTINUED TO WALK WHILE CONSTANTLY TURNING HIS HEAD..... SEVERAL OTHER CHILDREN REPEATED THIS ACTION..... ALL THE PARENTS, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, FORCED THEM TO MOVE ON.

IN THE 45 MINUTES THE MUSICIAN PLAYED, ONLY 6 PEOPLE STOPPED TO LISTEN FOR ANY AMOUNT OF TIME..... ABOUT 20 GAVE HIM MONEY BUT CONTINUED TO WALK THEIR NORMAL PACE..... HE COLLECTED \$32 AND CHANGE.

WHEN HE FINISHED PLAYING AND THE USUAL SOUNDS OF THE MORNING COMMUTE TOOK OVER THE CORRIDOR, NO ONE SEEMED TO NOTICE..... NO ONE APPLAUDED, AND THERE WAS NO RECOGNITION.

WHAT NO ONE SEEMED TO KNOW, WAS THAT THE VIOLINIST WAS JOSHUA BELL, A CHILD-PRODIGY VIOLINIST AND ONE OF THE MOST RENOWNED CLASSICAL MUSICIANS IN THE WORLD..... HE PLAYED ONE OF THE MOST INTRICATE PIECES EVER WRITTEN WITH A VIOLIN WORTH 3.5 MILLION DOLLARS. TWO DAYS BEFORE HIS PLAYING IN THE SUBWAY, JOSHUA BELL SOLD OUT A THEATER IN BOSTON WHERE THE CHEAP SEATS WENT FOR \$100 PER SEAT.

JOSHUA BELL PLAYING INCOGNITO IN THE METRO STATION WAS ORGANIZED BY THE WASHINGTON POST AS PART OF A SOCIAL EXPERIMENT ABOUT THE PERCEPTION AND PRIORITIES OF PEOPLE.....

SOME OF THE QUESTIONS ASKED WERE: IN AN EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENT AT AN UNEXPECTED HOUR: DO WE PERCEIVE BEAUTY? DO WE STOP TO APPRECIATE IT?

THIS STORY ILLUSTRATES SOMETHING THAT MARK IS GETTING AT IN TODAY'S GOSPEL READING. IN OUR STORY FOR TODAY, ONLY ONE PERSON RECOGNIZED JESUS FOR WHO HE ACTUALLY WAS..... A LOT OF THE PEOPLE IN THE SYNAGOGUE MERELY THOUGHT HE WAS AN AUTHORITATIVE TEACHER.

THEY KNEW THAT HE WAS DIFFERENT THAN THE SCRIBES, BUT THEY COULDN'T PUT THEIR FINGER ON EXACTLY WHY..... THEN A MAN IN THEIR MIDST, A MAN WITH AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT CRIES OUT, *“WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO WITH US, JESUS OF NAZARETH? HAVE YOU COME TO DESTROY US? I KNOW WHO YOU ARE, THE HOLY ONE OF GOD.”*

NOW THIS IS QUITE THE CONFESSION WE HAVE HERE. THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT IS THE ONLY PERSON IN THE ENTIRE SYNAGOGUE TO RECOGNIZE THE WORD MADE FLESH IN CHRIST..... NO ONE ELSE RECOGNIZES WHO CHRIST TRULY IS..... MARK'S STORY PRESENTS US WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION THAT ASKS IF WE ARE EVEN CAPABLE OF RECOGNIZING GOD IN THE WORLD?

**MUCH LIKE THE WASHINGTON POST EXPERIMENT
ASKED US IF WE RECOGNIZE BEAUTY IN THE WORLD,
MARK ASKS US IF WE CAN DO ANY BETTER THAN THE
MAN WITH THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT.**

**SO HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE GOD IN OUR MIDST TODAY?
IN 2012 -----A FAMILY IN CALIFORNIA----- A MOM AND HER
TWO KIDS----- AN INFANT SON AND A 10-YEAR-OLD
DAUGHTER ----WERE DRIVING ACROSS A BRIDGE WHEN
THEY WERE ACCIDENTALLY REAR-ENDED BY A
EIGHTEEN WHEEL SEMI-TRUCK..... THE SEMI WENT
THROUGH THE RAILING AND FELL A HUNDRED FEET TO
THE CREEK BELOW..... THE CAR TEETERED ON
THE EDGE OF THE BRIDGE – NOT QUITE OFF THE
GROUND, BUT NOT QUITE ON IT EITHER.**

WHEN THE EMERGENCY VEHICLES GOT TO THE SCENE, THEY WANTED TO MANEUVER THE CAR BACK ONTO SOLID GROUND SO THEY COULD RESCUE THIS FAMILY. ALMOST EVERY ATTEMPT WAS MET WITH THE CAR TEETERING EVEN MORE – THREATENING TO DROP THEM TO CREEK AS WELL..... ABOUT A HALF AN HOUR LATER – MANY ATTEMPTS TRIED AND FAILED – A GROUP OF NAVY MEN AND WOMEN CAME UP TO THIS SCENE AND SAID THEY HAD A VEHICLE BACK IN LINE THAT HAD A CRANE THAT COULD HELP BRING THE CAR BACK ONTO SOLID GROUND.....

AFTER A COUPLE HOURS OF BEING TRAPPED IN THIS VEHICLE, THE MOTHER AND CHILDREN WERE BACK ON SOLID GROUND AND EMERGENCY CREWS WERE ABLE TO GET THEM OUT OF THEIR CAR.

WHEN NEWS CREWS WERE INTERVIEWING SOME SPECTATORS OF THIS WHOLE THING, ONE WOMAN CALLED IT A MIRACLE AND SAID GOD WAS THERE HELPING THEM THE WHOLE TIME.....

I THINK IT'S EASY FOR US TO SEE GOD IN STORIES LIKE THIS, STORIES OF THE RESCUED FAMILY WITH A RENEWED SENSE OF LIFE..... STORIES OF BLESSING ARE OFTEN CLOSELY TIED TO GOD'S PRESENCE. BUT HOW CAN WE RECOGNIZE GOD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE TRUCKER'S FAMILY? WHERE IS GOD FOR THEM? WHERE IS GOD IN OUR SUFFERING?

I'M SURE THESE DISCIPLES OF JESUS ARE PERHAPS A BIT CONFUSED THAT THE FIRST THING JESUS DOES AFTER CALLING THEM TO BE HIS DISCIPLES IS TO GO INTO A SYNAGOGUE AND TO ENCOUNTER THIS SPIRIT.

THE FIRST ACT OF JESUS' MINISTRY – FOLLOWING HIS CALL TO THE DISCIPLES – IS TO POINT OUT THE SUFFERING AND EVIL THAT GOES ALONG WITH OUR LIFE IN THIS WORLD. IT'S ALMOST AS IF JESUS IS SAYING TO HIS DISCIPLES, THIS ROAD ISN'T GOING TO BE EASY..... AS WE INCH CLOSER AND CLOSER TO ASH WEDNESDAY, WE CAN BEGIN TO FEEL THIS MOVE TOWARD SUFFERING.....AND THAT EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THIS SUFFERING, THERE IS TRANSFORMATION.

THIS SUFFERING FROM UNCLEAN SPIRITS ISN'T SOMETHING THAT'S RELEGATED TO STORIES IN THE NEWSPAPER OR ON TELEVISION OR IN THE DUSTY HALLWAYS OF MARK'S TIME..... WE KNOW THESE STORIES ALL TOO WELL..... WE ALL HEAR THOSE VOICES IN THE BACK OF OUR HEAD – THE VOICES THAT TELL US WE'RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH, THAT WE'RE UNLOVABLE... THOSE VOICES THAT CREEP IN ON THOSE LONELY, SLEEPLESS NIGHTS. THESE ARE THE VOICES OF THE UNCLEAN SPIRITS..... WE KNOW THIS SUFFERING ALL TOO WELL, DON'T WE? BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT EVEN IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING, THERE IS TRANSFORMATION.

THIS IS THE MAIN POINT OF THIS GOSPEL TEXT.....
UNTIL WE FACE THE EVIL AND THE SUFFERING IN THIS
WORLD AND IN US – UNTIL WE NAME THE FORCES THAT
SEEK TO DESTROY US: ADDICTION, LONELINESS,
DEPRESSION, SIN TO NAME BUT A FEW – IT’S ONLY IN
NAMING THIS BROKENNESS AND ACKNOWLEDGING ITS
POWER, THAT WE OPEN OURSELVES UP TO BE
HEALED.....

THE FIRST STEP ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY IS
ADMITTING YOU HAVE A PROBLEM..... MY FRIENDS,
WE HAVE A PROBLEM.....

WE HAVE A PROBLEM WITH BROKENNESS. WE HAVE A
PROBLEM WITH SIN. WE HAVE A PROBLEM WITH
SELFISHNESS.

**BY ACKNOWLEDGING THESE PROBLEMS, THESE
SHORTCOMINGS, WE STOP TO SEE GOD'S HEALING
PRESENCE IN WAYS THE COMMUTERS IN THE DC METRO
STATION THAT JANUARY MORNING DID NOT..... WE
STOP TO SEE GOD'S HEALING PRESENCE IN THE CREEK
BENEATH THE TEETERING CAR IN THE SEMI..... WE
STOP TO SEE GOD'S HEALING PRESENCE IN THE MAN
WITH THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT..... AND WE STOP TO SEE
GOD'S HEALING PRESENCE IN US.**

THERE'S AN OLD NATIVE AMERICAN STORY ABOUT A CHIEF INSTRUCTING SOME BRAVES ABOUT THE STRUGGLE WITHIN. "IT IS LIKE TWO DOGS FIGHTING INSIDE OF US," THE CHIEF TOLD THEM. "THERE IS ONE GOOD DOG WHO WANTS TO DO THE RIGHT AND THE OTHER DOG WANTS TO DO THE WRONG. SOMETIMES THE GOOD DOG SEEMS STRONGER AND IS WINNING THE FIGHT. BUT SOMETIMES THE BAD DOG IS STRONGER AND WRONG IS WINNING THE FIGHT."

"WHO IS GOING TO WIN IN THE END?" A YOUNG BRAVE ASKS.

"THE ONE YOU FEED," THE CHIEF ANSWERED.

**THE ONLY FOOD AVAILABLE TO FEED THE GOOD DOG
WITHIN US COMES FROM ABOVE, IT COMES FROM
OUTSIDE OF US, IT'S THE FOOD OF HOPE AND GRACE
WHOSE SINGULAR NUTRITIONAL AUTHORITY COMES
FROM GOD. WE DO NOT HAVE THE POWER TO
OVERCOME EVIL ON OUR OWN.**

**IN FACT, LEFT TO OUR OWN DEVICES WE WILL CHOOSE
EVIL MORE OFTEN THAN GOOD.**

**THIS IS PRECISELY WHY INCLUDE A PRAYER OF
CONFESSION IN MOST OF OUR WORSHIP SERVICES.....**

**FAR FROM BEING THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS HYPOCRITES
THE WORLD PAINTS CHRISTIANS OUT TO BE, WE KNOW
ALL TOO WELL OUR OWN CAPACITY FOR EVIL AND OUR
OWN NEED FOR FORGIVENESS. AND THAT'S WHY WE
COME HERE.**

**IT'S HERE THAT WE ARE PERPETUALLY ASTOUNDED BY
THE FOOD OF HOPE AND GRACE.**

**IT'S HERE THAT WE MEET THE "HOLY ONE OF GOD"
WHO HAS THE AUTHORITY TO CALL EVIL OUT OF US, TO
FORGIVE US, AND TO TRANSFORM US.....**

**IT'S HERE THAT WE ARE FED ON THE SCRIPTURES
READ, PROCLAIMED, AND TAUGHT.**

IT'S HERE THAT WE ARE NOURISHED BY THE
SACRAMENTS THAT MAKE US ONE AND TRANSFORM US
AT THE SAME TIME.

AND IT'S AS WE LEAVE THIS PLACE AND FOLLOW THE
LIGHT OUT INTO THE WORLD THAT WE-----WE OF ALL
PEOPLE-----ARE GIVEN THE AUTHORITY TO SPEAK, AND
LIVE AND HEAL IN WAYS THAT FEED A HUNGRY WORLD.

NOW THAT'S TRULY ASTOUNDING.

PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND FOR
ME.....AMEN.