

**“DO NOT----I SAY DO NOT---TRY TO PUT GOD
IN A BOX!”**

**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK
(1:29-39) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON
FEBRUARY 7, 2021----**

**JUST WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF
JESUS?**

**AS CHRISTIANS, WE WOULD ALL CLAIM TO BE A
FOLLOWER OF JESUS AND WE WOULD ALL
CLAIM TO BE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.....I
GET THAT----- BUT WHAT ARE YOUR
EXPECTATIONS OF HOW HE MIGHT IMPACT YOUR
LIFE?**

AS WITH ANY RELATIONSHIP, IT IS SOMETHING WE GROW INTO AND OUR EXPECTATIONS CHANGE OVER THE YEARS AS WE GAIN MORE EXPERIENCE TOGETHER. BUT IT IS FAR TOO EASY TO GET STUCK WITH A FAIRLY NAÏVE, PERHAPS EVEN IMMATURE EXPECTATION OF JESUS' ACTIVITY IN OUR LIVES...

FOR EXAMPLE MANY PEOPLE NEVER MOVE BEYOND TREATING JESUS A LITTLE LIKE THE GENIE IN THE LAMP:

**IF I PRAY TO HIM AND ASK HIM FOR THINGS,
THEN I EXPECT HIM TO RESPOND TO ME AND
GIVE ME WHAT I ASK FOR AND I WILL GET
ANGRY WITH HIM IF HE DOESN'T DELIVER AND
MAYBE EVEN STOP COMING TO WORSHIP HIM
ALTOGETHER.**

**THAT GENIE IN A LAMP MENTALITY DOESN'T
REPRESENT THE FULLNESS OF RELATIONSHIP
THAT WE ARE CALLED TO ENJOY WITH JESUS.
BUT IT IS VERY COMMON AMONG MANY PEOPLE
AND IT WAS PARTICULARLY PREVALENT AMONG
THE PEOPLE WHO FIRST KNEW JESUS WHEN HE
BEGAN HIS MINISTRY IN PALESTINE 2,000 YEARS
AGO.**

THE STORY THAT WE HAVE JUST HEARD READ FROM MARK'S GOSPEL IS FUNDAMENTALLY ABOUT A MISUNDERSTANDING OF WHO JESUS IS AND WHAT SHOULD BE EXPECTED FROM HIM IN A RELATIONSHIP..... SO LET'S THINK ABOUT THIS PASSAGE A LITTLE MORE DEEPLY AND THINK ABOUT WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM IT, FOR OURSELVES, TODAY.

JESUS PERFORMED HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF HEALINGS DURING HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY AND NOT ALL OF THEM ARE RECORDED IN THE FOUR GOSPELS.

SO THE GOSPEL WRITERS WERE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT WHICH HEALING STORIES THEY INCLUDED IN THEIR ACCOUNTS OF JESUS' LIFE AND THEY CHOSE CERTAIN STORIES TO TEACH US SPECIFIC THINGS ABOUT JESUS, AND THE ONUS IS ON US TO TRY AND GET BENEATH THE SURFACE OF THESE STORIES TO SEE WHAT THEY WANT US TO LEARN.

ON ONE LEVEL – ON THAT SURFACE LEVEL - IT IS PRETTY OBVIOUS WHY MARK INCLUDED THIS ONE ABOUT THE HEALING OF SIMON PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW.....

MARK GLEANED THE INFORMATION FOR HIS GOSPEL PRIMARILY FROM THE REMINISCENCES OF SIMON PETER, SO IT WOULD SEEM FAIRLY LIKELY THAT THIS PARTICULAR HEALING OF A FAMILY MEMBER WOULD BE CLOSE TO SIMON'S HEART: OF COURSE HE WOULD WANT IT RECORDED FOR POSTERITY.... BUT MAYBE THERE IS MORE TO IT THAN THAT.....

IN THE FIRST TWO VERSES WE TWICE COME ACROSS THIS WORD 'IMMEDIATELY': FIRST --- IN VERSE 29 WE READ: "AND IMMEDIATELY THEY LEFT THE SYNAGOGUE..." AND THEN IN VERSE 30: "AND IMMEDIATELY THEY TOLD HIM ABOUT HER..."

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? IT APPEARS THAT MARK IS TRYING TO STRESS THE FACT THAT THERE IS URGENCY ON THE PART OF THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.....BUT WHY MIGHT THEY BE IN SUCH A HURRY?

WELL, THEY HAVE BEEN WITH HIM IN THE SYNAGOGUE AND THEY HAVE JUST WATCHED HIM HEAL A MAN WITH AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT AND SIMON'S MIND MUST HAVE BEEN RACING -----

HERE IS A HEALER – A MIRACLE MAN! “HOW ELSE CAN WE USE HIS POWERS? I KNOW – MY MOTHER-IN-LAW IS SICK: LET’S GET HIM TO HEAL HER TOO!”

SO HIS FOLLOWERS RUSH HIM OUT OF THE SYNAGOGUE AND WANT TO UTILIZE HIS GIFTS FOR THEIR OWN ENDS, PERHAPS A LITTLE BIT LIKE THE GENIE IN THE LAMP: THERE TO GRANT WISHES.

AND WOULDN'T YOU AGREE THAT THERE IS SOMETHING A BIT LIKE THAT IN ALL OF US, ISN'T THERE?

WHEN WE PRAY, HOW OFTEN DO WE TREAT GOD LIKE A GENIE IN THE LAMP; HOPING THAT HE WILL GRANT OUR EVERY WISH, OUR EVERY DESIRE?

HERE WE ARE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH ALMIGHTY GOD WHO HAS ALL POWER AND ALL AUTHORITY AND THE TEMPTATION IS ALWAYS THERE, ISN'T IT, TO ASK HIM TO DO THINGS FOR US THAT WE WANT HIM TO DO..... NOT THAT THERE IS ANYTHING WRONG IN PRAYING FOR OURSELVES, OF COURSE; BUT WE MUST ALWAYS ATTEND CLOSELY TO OUR MOTIVATIONS AND TRY OUR BEST TO ENSURE THAT WE ARE NOT BEING DRIVEN BY SELFISH DESIRES.

AND THEN THE PROBLEM BECOMES EXACERBATED: “THAT EVENING AFTER SUNSET THE PEOPLE BROUGHT TO JESUS ALL THE SICK AND DEMON POSSESSED.”CLEARLY WORD WAS SPREADING ABOUT THIS NEW MIRACLE WORKER IN THEIR MIDST AND NOW, EVERYONE WANTED A PIECE OF THE ACTION..... MARK WRITES: “THE WHOLE TOWN GATHERED AT THE DOOR...”

JESUS HAD HEALED THE MAN IN THE SYNAGOGUE AND SO THE DISCIPLES FIRST – AND THEN THE WHOLE TOWN ----BEGIN TO DEFINE WHO JESUS IS: HE IS A MIRACLE WORKER.....

AND SO JESUS BEGINS TO BE PUT IN A BOX BY THOSE WHO SEE HIM IN ACTION; HE IS PUT INTO THE BOX OF THEIR CHOICE AND THEY BEGIN TO RELATE TO HIM IN A PARTICULAR WAY THAT BEST MEETS THEIR OWN, SPECIFIC NEEDS.....

BUT ALREADY, WE SEE THAT THEY HAVE MOVED SO FAR FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY; THE WAY THEY ARE RELATING TO JESUS ALREADY IS A FAR CRY FROM HOW HE HAD INTRODUCED HIMSELF TO THEM JUST A FEW DAYS BEFORE, WHICH WAS AS A MESSENGER FROM GOD WITH A MESSAGE FOR THE PEOPLE.

WITHIN DAYS, JESUS HAS BECOME IDENTIFIED AND PLACED IN THAT BOX TITLED “MIRACLE WORKER” -----ONE WHO CAN MEET THEIR EVERY NEED AND THAT IS HOW THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL BEGIN TO RELATE TO HIM.

NEVERTHELESS, JESUS’ COMPASSION TRANSCENDS THE MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE PEOPLE AND WE READ THAT HE “HEALED MANY WHO HAD VARIOUS DISEASES. HE ALSO DROVE OUT MANY DEMONS...”

THERE IS AN INTERESTING PARADOX IN THIS BIT OF THE STORY AS THE PEOPLE BEGIN TO FORGE A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS..... CLEARLY, THEY WANT TO UTILIZE HIS POWER BECAUSE THEY ARE BRINGING THE SICK TO HIM AND OUR TEXT SAYS, “THEY BROUGHT TO JESUS ALL THE SICK...” -----BUT IN THAT SAME VERSE, WE ARE ALSO TOLD THAT THIS CONSTANT STREAM OF PEOPLE BEGAN “AFTER SUNSET” AND THAT IS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE THE SABBATH ENDED AT SUNSET SO IT WOULD THEN HAVE BEEN WITHIN THE RELIGIOUS LAW FOR THEM TO CARRY SICK PEOPLE THROUGH THE STREETS.

SO WE SEE THE PEOPLE CAUGHT IN AN INTERESTING SITUATION: THEY ARE THIRSTING FOR SOMETHING NEW; THE POWER OF THIS NEW MIRACLE WORKER - BUT THEY ARE STILL RESIDING WITHIN THE PURITY LAWS OF JUDAISM; WAITING UNTIL AFTER SUNSET TO COME TO HIM.....

THEY ARE CAUGHT IN THE TENSION BETWEEN THE NEW AND THE OLD, BETWEEN A LIVING FAITH AND RITUALISM: WHICH, OF COURSE, IS WHERE MOST OF US FIND OURSELVES IN OUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEY AND THAT IS WHY MARK WANTS TO INCLUDE THIS STORY.

IT IS MORE THAN JUST A STORY ABOUT JESUS' HEALING POWER: MARK IS CONTINUING TO REALLY DRIVE HOME HIS KEY POINT SO FAR; THAT JESUS REPRESENTS SOMETHING NEW AND, IF WE WANT TO EXPERIENCE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS, WE NEED TO OPEN OURSELVES UP TO THE NEW, AND NOT JUST RESIDE IN EMPTY TRADITION...

AND SO WE CONTINUE: "VERY EARLY IN THE MORNING, WHILE IT WAS STILL DARK, JESUS GOT UP, LEFT THE HOUSE AND WENT OFF TO A WILDERNESS PLACE, WHERE HE PRAYED."

FINDING HIMSELF IN THE WILDERNESS ALONE WITH HIS GOD IS A MOMENT OF RECONNECTION FOR JESUS.... A MOMENT OF DEEP INTIMACY IN WHICH HE CAN BREATHE DEEPLY AND BE HIMSELF WITH HIS FATHER. A BEAUTIFUL MOMENT...

BUT LOOK AT WHAT HAPPENS:

“SIMON AND HIS COMPANIONS WENT TO LOOK FOR HIM...” THOSE PESKY PEOPLE JUST WON’T LEAVE HIM ALONE! THEY WANT THEIR MIRACLE WORKER BACK! HOW DARE HE JUST WALK OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT!

**THEY'VE GOT MORE HEALINGS AND EXORCISMS
LINED UP FOR HIM.**

**AND ISN'T IT INTERESTING THAT MARK DOESN'T
CALL THEM "THE DISCIPLES": HE CALLS THEM
"SIMON AND HIS COMPANIONS"..... AND WHY IS
THAT? ----- BECAUSE, QUITE SIMPLY, THEY
WEREN'T BEHAVING LIKE DISCIPLES AT THIS
POINT! THEY WEREN'T FOLLOWING THEIR LORD
IN HUMBLE OBEDIENCE. INSTEAD, THEY WERE
STILL TREATING JESUS LIKE A GENIE IN THE
LAMP. "COME ON JESUS, GET OFF YOUR KNEES,
GET BACK TO CAPERNAUM: THERE'S WORK FOR
YOU TO DO!"**

SIMON AND HIS COMPANIONS ARE HUNTING JESUS DOWN. THEY ARE HASSLING HIM, THEY ARE HARASSING HIM, REMINDING HIM JUST HOW MUCH HE IS NEEDED AS A MIRACLE WORKER!

BUT JESUS IS HAVING NONE OF IT... 'JESUS REPLIED, "LET US GO SOMEWHERE ELSE – TO THE NEARBY VILLAGES – SO THAT I CAN PREACH THERE ALSO. FOR THAT IS WHY I CAME OUT".'

THERE'S A COUPLE OF THINGS TO NOTICE ABOUT THIS VERSE. FIRST, JESUS SAYS THAT HE WANTS TO MOVE ON TO OTHER VILLAGES, AND THE PHRASE HE USES IS: "SO THAT I CAN PREACH THERE ALSO". ----THERE IS NO MENTION OF HEALINGS, NO MENTION OF EXORCISMS ---- BUT ONLY THAT HE HAS A MESSAGE TO BRING... AGAIN, MARK IS CONTRASTING JESUS' SELF-UNDERSTANDING WITH THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE CROWD. HE WANTS TO PREACH – THEY WANT HIM TO PERFORM MIRACLES. SECONDLY, NOTICE WHAT HE SAYS: "FOR THAT IS WHY I CAME OUT".

MANY ENGLISH BIBLES TRANSLATE THIS INCORRECTLY IN MY VIEW; THEY USUALLY SAY, “THAT IS WHY I HAVE COME”, OR SOMETHING SIMILAR BUT THE GREEK DOESN’T SAY, “THAT IS WHY I HAVE COME”, IT SAYS “THAT IS WHY I CAME OUT”.

THE DIFFERENCE IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IF WE TRANSLATE IT, “THAT IS WHY I HAVE COME”, WE CAN READ THIS AS A STATEMENT BY JESUS ABOUT HIS MINISTRY AND VOCATION IN ITS TOTALITY.

BUT IF WE TRANSLATE IT DIRECTLY FROM THE GREEK, “THAT IS WHY I CAME OUT”, IT IS A COMMENT ON THE FACT THAT JESUS HAS COME OUT OF CAPERNAUM AND PETER’S HOUSE AND THAT TAKES ON A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MEANING...

JESUS IS SAYING THAT HE CAME OUT OF CAPERNAUM AND PETER’S HOUSE BECAUSE HE WANTS TO ESCAPE FROM PEOPLE’S WRONG EXPECTATIONS OF HIM: HE IS NOT A TAME MIRACLE WORKER; HE IS A MAN WITH A MESSAGE ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HE MUST COME OUT OF THE BOX THEY HAVE PUT HIM IN IN ORDER TO PREACH THAT MESSAGE.

JESUS WILL NOT BE CONTAINED IN THEIR BOX.

JESUS WILL NOT BE CONTAINED IN YOUR BOX,

OR MINE...HE IS NOT A GENIE IN THE LAMP; HE IS

THE SON OF GOD WITH AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT

MISSION...

AND MARK REALLY PUSHES THIS POINT HOME:

“SO HE TRAVELLED THROUGHOUT GALILEE,

PREACHING IN THEIR SYNAGOGUES AND

DRIVING OUT DEMONS.”

NOTICE THAT HE DOESN'T SAY, “PREACHING

IN *THE* SYNAGOGUES...” BUT “PREACHING

IN *THEIR* SYNAGOGUES...”

AGAIN, JESUS IS PICTURED BY MARK AS DISTANCING HIMSELF FROM THE TRADITIONS AND INSTITUTIONALISM OF THE ESTABLISHED FAITH. EVEN THOUGH THIS IS JESUS' HOME DISTRICT, MARK SPEAKS OF HIM AS IF HE IS A VISITOR;---

IT'S THEIR SYNAGOGUES THAT HE PREACHES IN
----ALL THE CONVENTIONS OF A COMFORTABLE
FAITH ARE 'THEIRS', NOT 'HIS'...

SO, WE SEE YET AGAIN MARK'S AGENDA THAT
HE IS DRIVING HOME TO US: JESUS WILL NOT BE
PUT IN A BOX: IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT BOX
YOU WANT TO PUT JESUS IN. JESUS REFUSES
TO SIT IN IT. HE WILL NOT BE TURNED INTO A
CONSUMER PRODUCT. HE WILL NOT IDENTIFY
WITH YOUR DESIRE, MY DESIRE, TO TURN HIM
INTO A GENIE IN THE LAMP.

BUT WHILE THAT IS TRUE, THE AMAZING TRUTH
OF THE GRACE AND LOVE OF JESUS IS THAT,
EVEN THOUGH THE CROWDS AND THE FIRST
DISCIPLES GOT IT SO WRONG, HE NEVER
CHASTIZED THEM, HE DID NOT GET ANGRY WITH
THEM.

HE DID NOT TURN HIS BACK ON THEM, OR REFUSE THEIR DEMANDS...EVEN THOUGH THEY MISUNDERSTOOD HIM, HE STILL, OUT OF LOVE, MET THEM IN THEIR NEED.

AND SO HE IS WITH US TODAY: WE MAY NOT HAVE A PERFECT UNDERSTANDING OF WHO JESUS IS, WE MAY NOT RELATE TO HIM AS WE SHOULD-----WE MAY TREAT HIM INAPPROPRIATELY, BUT HE WILL NOT FORSAKE US OR TURN HIS BACK ON US OUT OF FRUSTRATION.

HIS LOVE FOR US TRANSCENDS OUR
IGNORANCE, OUR SELFISHNESS.

CERTAINLY, WE NEED TO GROW UP AND
MATURE IN THE FAITH. BUT IN THE MEANTIME,
WHILE WE MAY AT TIMES STILL BEHAVE LIKE
SPOILED BRATS WHO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS
AND SILLY CHILDREN WHO WANT TO SNAP OUR
FINGERS AND HAVE THE MESSIAH COME
RUNNING-----JESUS WILL NEVER FORSAKE US.
SUCH IS THE LOVE OF GOD FOR US..... AND
FOR THIS WE ARE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL.....

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

