

Mark 1:40-45 - 11th February 2018

Mark 1:40-45. We've just heard it. To connect it with where we left it last week. We saw who Mark was and from whom he got his information, Simon Peter! We saw how much is viewed through Simon Peter's eyes. We also ended with *this map*. Jesus has left the crowd at Simon's house while he goes on to preach the good news of the Realm of God to the thousands who inhabit the region of Galilee, which is roughly that area within the red circle.

Now we come to the end of the chapter. There are things in this chapter that Mark wants us to see; things critical for the next phase of Mark's gospel which is Chapter 2:1 through to the important junction that is 3:6. Exciting stuff!

And it has to do with this question? Do we see who Jesus is? Do we see it? Are the people listening to Jesus' words and witnessing his work see it?

He tells us who he is in the very first verse.

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God". 1:1

But is everyone seeing it? Or are they seeing the Jesus they are hoping for or the one of their expectations? When they hear the words of a man but then see extraordinary miracles, are they hearing the words as from one who does such wonders or forgetting the words and no longer hearing them but just want whatever miracle this guy can do next?

It's a relevant question. Do we see Jesus for who He is and hear his words as words coming from Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, or, perhaps, is our sight and hearing clouded and muffled because deep down we don't actually believe He loves us, or is Risen, or His Word is true?

In verse 40, we are not told where Jesus was but he is approached by a man who is described as having leprosy. This word was used to cover a number of conditions that we read of in detail in Leviticus. Infectious skin diseases that, in those days without medicines, had horrendous implications; personal, religious and social. Not just for the one with the leprosy but also the communities in which they lived. People with infectious skin diseases had to remove themselves from society so as not to spread the disease and also not make everyone else ceremonially unclean, which they would do if they touched someone else or if someone else touched them. They could still go to the synagogue if there was a way they could be screened off from everyone else. So it's not impossible that this person first comes across Jesus in a synagogue. But we don't know much more about him than that. He comes to Jesus and asks for his help. And his question is interesting isn't it.

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean."

Only the temple priests could declare ceremonial cleanness, so it appears that, in Jesus, this man has seen enough to believe that this man can actually cure him.

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. V41-42.

Jesus feels something guttural. The word 'pity' is an attempt by the translators of the NRSV to whitewash a strong word in the greek that it unduly softens. We do love our Jesus 'meek and mild' don't we. The word has 'anger' at its root. This word is used in only two ways in the other parts of the New Testament where we encounter it.

It is a positive reaction if it is an anger directed towards addressing something wrong, in line with God's purpose, when it is inspired by God.

It is a negative reaction when that anger is directed in a way that is neither from God nor serves His purposes and ways. When it is not from God and flows out of our selfish, sinful nature.

So, of course it's not anger directed to the request from the leper. It is an anger prompted by Jesus' reaction to seeing this man's suffering. He feels an outrage against it as is fitting in the One through whom all things were made and by his coming is the firstfruits of the new creation, who has come to make all things new. Some translations have then 'anger' in their text. Others have the word 'compassion'. I think compassion is the best option for it's clear what is driving Jesus' response. A strong guttural desire to help this man in his suffering. I think it is also Mark making clear the humanity of Jesus. This is not some automaton or divine being who feels nothing. Jesus is fully man! Be in no doubt about it he is telling us. But a human being responding to suffering, injustice, unbelief and ignorance in God's way.

So he touches him! Wow! Makes himself ceremonially unclean! That's amazing. I wonder what that was like for this leper? I wonder when it was that anyone last touched him? Such a powerful statement that further demonstrates the love and compassion of Jesus. Jesus sets aside the ceremonial law to bring healing and restoration to this man.

*After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, **44** saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." v43-44*

That 'sternly warning' is a great word

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Why the strong language? Again it has this sense of being deeply moved, gutturally feeling with a passion as words of admonition are spoken. But why would words of admonition and warning be given to someone you have just healed.

What does he tell him to do?

“See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”

So he is telling him to go to the priest in Jerusalem, at the temple and do the offering that the Law requires as evidence to the priest that you are healed.

Leviticus 14:1-32 describe what is required of him and which Jesus tells him to do.

Why is it a testimony to them? Well, it is the first time we see the approach that Jesus uses more of in the next chapter in his exchanges with the priests and teachers of the Law. That the miracles are non-verbal declarations that Jesus is doing these things by the Will and Power of the Father. It is linked in what that question Mark is presenting to us. Do you see Jesus, really see him for who He is, or do you see something else of your own creation?

But there is something else this guy is to told do. Say nothing!!!

“But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, v45a

And the results for the approach that Jesus had been taking, of going into towns so he can start by preaching in the synagogues, is profound:

so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter. v45b

Later on, when Jesus is standing in boats on the sea of galilee its because it's the only way he could speak to such a large crowd. Yes - because he could no longer go into the towns to preach. The preaching of the kingdom; explaining what he is doing and why, is crucial to the

declaration for Jesus and as we saw last week and will do repeatedly as we go through Mark's gospel, the miracles back up Jesus' words, not supplant the preaching.

So why does this guy not do what Jesus asks, in spite of the stern warning? We don't know. Perhaps that is why Jesus, deeply moved, warned him, because he could see the guy's heart and knew that he was inclined to not listen.

So why did he not listen? Back to Mark's question? Can you see who Jesus is? It's been a theme since verse 21, when Jesus goes into that synagogue in Capernaum and proclaims the Kingdom of God and heals the demon-possessed man.

In Capernaum, in the synagogue, the crowd are amazed.

"What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. v27-28

We see then that the crowd descended on Simon's place and they spend the evening healing. The next morning...

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. **36** And Simon and his companions hunted for him. **37** When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."

"Everyone is searching for you." There is a bit of an edge there.

What is Mark wanting us to see?

The people in Capernaum didn't get it. They spread his fame.

Jesus didn't come for fame. He came to declare the good news of God. He was looking for people to respond to that news and turn back to the Living God.

The disciples didn't get it. They got all excited about all this healing to be done. He has to remind them:

"Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

This man healed of leprosy didn't keep quiet because he didn't get it.

After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, **44** saying to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone

He went and promptly ignored what the one who had healed him said to him. Wow! He did not see who it was who was telling him not to speak!!!

They missed all the pointers Jesus was giving them; that he was the one come to fulfill all those prophecies in Isaiah. Remember that Mark quotes Isaiah 8 times and some commentators call Mark ‘the Gospel of Isaiah’.

Who does Mark record as getting it? The demons!! Only the demons seem to grasp who it must be to have such authority.

Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24 and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” 1:23-24

It may interest you to know that the last person to speak in Mark’s gospel before the day of Jesus’ death says this:

But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I *do not know* this man you are talking about.” 14:71

That’s Simon, Peter, ‘Rocky’, and that’s the third of his denials. He had been with Jesus three years. Mark is showing us that, after all that time, Peter still doesn’t see it. For Mark though, that’s part of the point he is trying to make - that actually, we can’t truly see who Jesus really is, until we see him through the prism of the Cross.

So we finish chapter 1. Next week, the action increases, as does the conflict with the pharisees. Which Jesus will we see? We pray that we will increasingly see Jesus as he is; Holy and Anointed One; our Saviour, Friend, Redeemer, Lord.