

We reach an important junction point today in Mark's gospel. After this junction point, everything changes. So it's a good time to conclude part one of our year in Mark's gospel and pick it up after Easter.

So why is this chapter such an important junction? We need to recap to be clear. Mark begins his good news of Jesus with a huge spoiler! He tells us who Jesus is!

The beginning of the good news[a] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.[b]

We saw then that he quotes Isaiah; one of eight times he quotes Isaiah! In fact Mark has been called the Gospel of Isaiah!

Jesus then is baptised and we read this:

And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. **11** And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved;[h] with you I am well pleased."

An authentication to us that Mark's opening sentence is true! Jesus is the Son of God.

Then Jesus calls the disciples and the proclamation of the Realm of God begins.

Boom! Then the action starts. Capernaum! Jesus is in the synagogue teaching. The people are amazed at the authority with which he teaches. This is different! He has authority. But they don't get it - they don't get who he is. The demon-possessed man gets it.

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." 1:24-25! We noted a couple of weeks ago that only the demons see who Jesus is. Not the disciples! We saw when the crowds are hammering on Peter's mother-in-law's home and Jesus has gone off early to pray and was not keen to be found, they rebuke Jesus when they find him and are bemused when Jesus says `let`s go somewhere else`. And off they go to this wider area here.

The pharisees don't get it for they are outraged and accuse him of blasphemy when he tells the paralytic man his sins are forgiven.

At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? **9** Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? **10** But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— **11** "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." 2:8-11

In spite of this, they argue about the sabbath, about fasting, when they see him drinking with `tax-collectors and sinners` - `scum` is a better word to describe how the pharisees felt about the people Jesus were dealing with.

We`ve seen the content of this good news emerge: the forgiveness of sins, a re-framing of the Old Testament to remind everyone of the first principles of the law, as illustrated last week by that brilliant truth of "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath."

We have seen that to follow Jesus is to trust him and thus to obey him for to obey him is to trust him.

And is this passage Mark brings all that back into focus and ends with a chilling note.

Again he entered the synagogue. So we can assume this is the Capernaum synagogue again. A man with a withered hand is there. So are the Pharisees, the `they` in verse 2, for the context picks up immediately from the end of chapter 2 and that conversation with the pharisees about the Sabbath. We can tell that they disagreed with Jesus and his argument about the Sabbath for they are there to specifically see if he does something on the sabbath so they can accuse him.

Jesus knows. So he gets the man to stand in front of everyone.

Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." **4** Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him. NLT

Wouldn`t answer!!! I wonder how long did Jesus let the question hang in the air.. Did he repeat the question...feeling anger and sadness I wonder how much anger and grief showed on his face or in his tone...does he shake his head in despair...

He ... said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

For the pharisees that was a `right! That`s it` moment.

6 The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

This is the junction point. The rest of Mark`s gospel is the working out of that conspiracy as Jesus continues to proclaim the good news of the Realm of God

What does it mean to follow Jesus..I wonder if that is what the disciples are thinking at that moment... Oh my! What have you done Jesus..

What is it going to cost us...where is this going to end...what happens now....could all have been legitimate questions they were thinking right then.

They are legitimate questions for us too.

Mark is showing us that religious practices, even done in the name of God, may actually be counter to the purposes of God if they are done with a lack of understanding of who God is and what it means to follow him.

Have our hearts become hardened...is a very good question to ask ourselves.

Have we become hardened to the needs of others and think God wants first and foremost religious acts

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?

says the Lord;

I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams

and the fat of fed beasts;

I do not delight in the blood of bulls,

or of lambs, or of goats....

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;

remove the evil of your doings

from before my eyes;

cease to do evil...

17 learn to do good;

seek justice,

rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.
18 Come now, let us argue it out,
says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.

Isaiah 1:11, 17-18

There it is: forgiveness of sins, doing right as forgiven people and God`s displeasure of religious acts which don`t incorporate, include or lead onto all it means to be people of God`s Kingdom. Jesus is teaching nothing new. It was there in Isaiah.

So we can see that it is Grace first; redeemed by God, we care for others as acts of praise to the One who redeemed us.

We see how it makes sense that Mark is saying we don`t feel see who Jesus is until the Cross.

We also see what it means to follow Jesus. We see here a linking of Mission, Discipleship and Worship.

God reaches out in Grace and we are called to be part of this proclamation of the Realm of God, it is this that is an expression of our discipleship and all to the praise of His name.

We can sometimes slip into the same mistake of the pharisees and split those three apart. Discipleship becomes doing certain things, worship is what happens on a Sunday at church and mission is an optional extra to those who are called to it.

Straight away we are in trouble. For it disconnects the purposes of God, from what we do as His people and turns `worship` into just a religious act rather than a continual outpouring of praise to the God who is with us every moment and is constantly at work in us as we travel through each day.

This is a pic I use as part of my missional archdeacon stuff.

Being a follower of Jesus, a Church with a Mission Action Plan, is to have all three of these constantly engaged in our lives.

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us **5** even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ[[a](#)]**—**by grace you have been saved**— 6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God**— 9** not the result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

That is what the Pharisees forgot...

That is why Jesus is so angry...how dare you reduce following God into just religious acts!

That is why Jesus is so sad! So many diminished lives - inside and outside the church.

Mark ends with Jesus now no longer going anyway. Now the country is coming to him.

In Chapter 1, Jesus travelled in this area,

Now people are coming to him from this area.

Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; **8** hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon.

The good news is spreading, its impact is national and drawing thousands upon thousands. The establishment is in panic and only the demons get it and now the pharisees are off plotting his death...the road to the Cross has begun.