

2007-2008 Preaching Series
The Gospel of Mark
Part 3: "*Disciples Discover Jesus' Mission*"
Introduction

*Open my eyes that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me...*
Clara H. Scott

*Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored,
and he saw everything clearly.*
Mark 8:25

As we continue with the study of Mark's Gospel, which is based on the preaching of Peter after the resurrection, we also enter into the winter month of January. What a great time to sit by a fire with the Word of God and discover new truths the Holy Spirit wants to impart to our hearts! With this image in mind, these studies are longer Bible adventures than the previous ones. The hope continues to be that groups will enjoy both the general discussions and opportunities for partner sharing throughout the study.

However, each study has far more material than a single meeting can digest. Therefore, group leaders are strongly encouraged to read over the study topics, and select portions which will most fit their group's needs and interests prior to the meeting time. Please do continue to use the "Concluding Discussion" and "My Gospel Prayer" as you draw each meeting to a close.

In addition, **individuals both in small groups and on their own** are encouraged to complete all of the studies during the week, listening for the whisper of the Holy Spirit as you become enlightened and challenged by God's personal word to you. You have the opportunity to join the Lord in His final year of ministry as the opposition forces grow stronger, and learn with the disciples as they struggle to grasp just what His mission is. May you indeed be blessed as the Master invites you to travel throughout Galilee and the regions beyond, feeding you bread from His hand and the very Bread of Life through His love. He is always offering new truths to see, deeper wisdom to hear.

Sunday, January 13, 2008

The Gospel of Mark

Part 2: "Disciples Discover Jesus' Mission"

"Disciples Discover: Jesus' Mission is OUR Mission"

Mark 6:7-29

Jesus sends out His disciples to experience what they have been observing. They move from listening and watching to doing, into partnership in His mission. The dangers of their choices are underscored by the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod Antipas.

Warming Up: (partners - 5 minutes)

- Has a hasty promise ever gotten you or someone you know in trouble or led to regret later? Explain.

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read Mark 6:7-13.

a. How do the specific instructions of Jesus equip the disciples to live simply and in dependence on God alone? Over what does Jesus give the disciples authority? _____

b. Eugene Peterson, in The Message, translates Matthew's version of this scene, "You don't need a lot of equipment. You are the equipment." What does this mean? _____

c. Continuing in Matthew's version, the instructions Jesus gives fill almost all of chapter 10. In verse 16, He warns, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." What is Jesus saying in simple words to His disciples?

– How does Romans 16:19 add to your understanding? How do you feel about His advice? _____

➔ **With a partner:** Why do you think Jesus sends the disciples out in pairs? Do you have a partner in ministry, someone with whom you share your role in the mission of Jesus?

➔ **With a partner:** Peterson translates verse 12, “Then they were on the road. They preached with joyful urgency that life can be radically different.” Do you ever feel “joyful urgency” to share the gospel?

➔ **With a partner:** How does this passage underscore the difference for the disciples between learning about and actually discovering the mission of Jesus? In your life, are you more in the “learn about” stage, or are you “discovering”? Explain.

2. Read Mark 6:14-29.

a. How do the rumors and explanations about Jesus which reach Herod Antipas reflect an inability to “think outside the box”? Do you think people are inclined today to suffer the same spiritual blindness of reducing the miraculous works of God to known realities?

b. Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, names Herodias’ daughter as Salome. Her family is first seen Biblically at the birth of Jesus, when her great-grandfather, Herod the Great, orders the massacre of infants at the time of Jesus’ birth. (Matthew 2:16-18). According to the commentator, William Barclay, there was a Jewish saying that “It is safer to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son.” Herod the Great had seven sons by five wives and murdered three of these sons in power struggles. Herod Antipas is one of the surviving sons.

At the time of the dance, Herodius is not only a former sister-in-law to Herod Antipas through her first husband Herod Philip, but also is niece to Herod Antipas through her half-brother Aristobulus. Thus, Salome is not only a step-daughter to Herod but also his niece through Herod Philip and grandniece through Herodius and Aristobulus. Are you thoroughly confused? Imagine being in this family! This same Herod Antipas will interrogate Jesus after His arrest. (Luke 23:7-12).

– How does this background, as confusing as it is, contribute to your understanding of the choices both Herodius and Salome make in this passage? What would it be like to be a young girl in such an environment? _____

- c. Using Matthew's version as well (14:1-12), characterize the relationship between
- Herod and John _____
 - Herod and Herodias _____
 - Herodias and John _____
 - Salome and Herodias _____

d. John is arrested and bound by Herod's power and authority as tetrarch (ruler of 1/4 of the region). Herod is bound by what people think (see Matthew 14:5,9). Given what you already know about John the Baptist from Mark 1, which one is more imprisoned? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Do the opinions of others imprison you? Why or why not?*

e. How do Herod's oaths, in marriage and to Salome, violate higher moral laws? Read Jesus' values concerning oaths in Matthew 5:33-37. How has "the evil one" used Herod's oaths? _____

- Culturally, we make many oaths (the pledge to the flag, marriage vows, membership oaths...church, clubs, societies, ordination vows for elders and ministers, etc.) How do the words of Jesus speak to your heart about vows which bind you? _____
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Concluding Discussion

In Matthew, chapter 10, Jesus elaborates on His advice to the apostles before sending them out, stressing the dangers to which they are exposing themselves. In The Message, verses 21 and 22 say, "When people realize it is the living God you are presenting and not some idol that makes them feel good, they are going to turn on you, even people in your own family. There is a great irony here: proclaiming so much love, experiencing so much hate!" How do all the passages discussed today underscore the violent, dangerous world of Jesus' mission? Discuss the shear raw courage of Jesus, the disciples, and John. Would you want to be a part of them?

My Gospel Prayer...

○ Lord, how sheltered my world is. How protected from the violence and threat portrayed in the media. I listen and watch You work in lives around me. I read Your word with such enthusiasm. But You call me from the comforts of my routines and material blessings to get on the road with You, to leave behind the trappings of life in society and abandon myself to your mission. Fill me with “joyful urgency.” Equip me with Your spirit as I discover what it means to partner with You alone. Free me from the prison of other people’s opinions and expectations. Give me courage to endure hatred, and return only love. This is not an easy prayer for me to make...following You, really following You, is very scary. Only Your grace enables such commitment.

Notes:

Sunday, January 20, 2008

The Gospel of Mark

Part 2: "Disciples Discover Jesus' Mission"

"Disciples Discover: Jesus' Mission Acted Out"

Mark 6:30-56

Returning from their first experiences on the road, Jesus, grieving for his cousin John, invites them to come with Him away from the crowds so they can rest. Instead, the exhausted disciples are plunged into a twenty-four hour period of high demand, miraculous wonders, and terrifying drama as Jesus continues to unfold His mission to them.

Warming Up: (partners - 5 minutes)

- Do you ever actively seek solitude? When and where? If you do not, why not? What is the longest time you have been in solitude?

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read Mark 6:30-44.

Reread verses 12, 30, 31 as a unit.

- a. The Message phrases verse 12, "right and left they sent the demons packing; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies, healing their spirits." What kind of stories do you suppose they tell the Master?
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- b. On the other hand, Matthew suggests that Jesus is filled with different emotions. Read 14:12-13. What does it feel like to lose a cousin you have been brought up with, your friend and companion from childhood?
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- c. How would you describe this tender reunion between Jesus and the disciples?
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➔ **With a partner:** Memorize with your partner Jesus' words: "Come with me by your[self] to a quiet place and get some rest." Write this verse on a 3 x 5 card and put it on your mirror or by your coffee pot. Discuss with your partner how you can obey your Lord in this gentle, loving command, which He whispers to you today.

2. Reread verses 32-44.

a. Mark fills the narrative with details which bring this overly-familiar story to life. What do you discover in the text which helps you picture the experience in your mind? _____

b. Read Ezekiel 34:11-16. How does this prophecy come true as Jesus feeds the people both physically and spiritually?

c. R. Alan Cole, in his commentary on Mark, observes that the disciples' calculations (regarding the logistical cost of feeding 5000 men) are "quite correct; but they had omitted from their calculations Jesus, the incalculable factor." How are we inclined to be like the disciples in our daily problem solving abilities? _____

d. Some have attempted to explain away this event by saying that Jesus merely prompts everyone to share the food they have brought. What aspects of Mark's narrative and Jesus' conduct give direct clues that this explanation is inadequate? _____

e. The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible defines miracles as "events in the external world, wrought by the immediate power of God and intended as a sign." The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle found in all four gospels, which suggests its great significance. What sign might it be revealing? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Have you ever been 5 loaves and 2 fish...way too little and inadequate for a huge task, and yet when Jesus took you in His hands and blessed you, there was enough of you to go around and even more left over? Share your own experience or how you have witnessed this miracle of adequacy in the life of someone else.*

3. Read Mark 6:45-56.

a. Logistically, Jesus has fed the 5000 men near Bethsaida on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 9:10). The men are now traveling by boat to Gennesaret on the west shore of the lake. Read Matthew's

version of this story in 14:22-33. What information do you discover in this later version which Mark omits? _____

b. Mark's gospel, generally acknowledged to have been written by John Mark, is considered to be the earliest written gospel and is an account of Jesus' life based on the preaching of Peter. John Mark was not an eye witness, but rather one who heard Peter's eye witness testimony. Why do you think Matthew (Levi), who is one of the eye witness disciples in the boat, records remarkable details about Peter, facts which Mark omits? If you were Peter, would you want to share with others this extraordinary experience? _____

c. Trace the time frame of these exhausted men from the following verses in Mark: 6:30, 6:35, 6:44, 6:45, 6:48. Remember that Jesus has said to them "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." At what time do they see Jesus coming toward them? Does their reaction to Jesus make sense in verse 50? How have the plans Jesus has had for "quiet" and "rest" been turned upside down? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *If you were on that boat today metaphorically, where would you be?*

- *Clinging to the mast*
- *Watching from the side*
- *Climbing over to join Jesus*
- *Walking on water*
- *Sinking under and crying out*

➔ **With a partner:** *How do the wind and waves in your life redirect your focus and cause you to fear?*

d. How are the disciples described in verse 52? Is it comforting or disturbing to you that even the disciples in the very presence of Jesus have hearts so hardened that they are blinded and unable to see who He is? _____

- Read Ezekiel 36:26. What does it promise?
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➔ **With a partner:** Reread verses 53-56. If you were one of the disciples, which detail from these verses would you expand upon if you were trying to explain the mission of Jesus to your own family? Why?

Concluding Discussion

What do you understand about the mission of Jesus from these discussions and scriptures? How does this mission challenge us today?

My Gospel Prayer...

O Lord, before my very eyes, You pile on miracle after miracle, but I seek only rational explanation. You send me out in ministry, and eagerly await my reporting back. Yet the demands of a clamoring world intrude, and I ask, "How can I possibly meet the needs around me?" In Your sufficiency, You fill me to overflowing. You invite me to walk on the water with You, and Your nail scarred hand pulls me from the deep when the storms distract me from the look of love in Your eyes. With You, my boat arrives safely at the shore, and Your work begins again. Forgive me for my hardened heart, blind eyes, self-programmed life. How spontaneously You respond with lavish generosity to those who merely touch the hem of Your garment. Share with me Your mission Lord Jesus. Teach me selfless abandon to You. Let my heart be melted by Your constant love. Cast out my fear that I may fall on my knees and worship You.

Notes:

Sunday, January 27, 2008

The Gospel of Mark

Part 2: "Disciples Discover Jesus' Mission"

"Disciples Discover: What Drives Jesus' Mission"

Mark 7:1-37

Jesus has stirred up enough attention that the Pharisees and teachers of the law have come from Jerusalem to the region of Galilee to see Him. The disciples learn more about the mission of Jesus as He clarifies the difference between rules and attitudes. Two powerful healing incidents underscore His heart of compassion, not only for the Jews first, but also for Gentiles.

Warming Up: (partners - 5 minutes)

- Describe a situation in which you became physically very dirty. What is the dirtiest you can ever remember being? What were you doing that made you so dirty?

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read Mark 7:1-23.

- a. This dispute with the Pharisees begins with their complaint about the disciples of Jesus eating without the required ceremonial washing of hands. Why does this really become a discussion of purity rather than cleanliness? _____
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- b. The NIV Study Bible explains that the Pharisees, in addition to the Tora, "accepted as equally inspired and authoritative all material contained within the oral *tradition*." Discuss the issue of Corban, as Mark explains it in verses 11-13. How is it possible for the Pharisees to manipulate a gift for God in a way that it dishonors their own parents? _____
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➔ **With a partner:** In *The Message*, Paul further observes in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "Just because something is technically legal doesn't mean that it is spiritually appropriate." Have you known someone who has been tempted to use this rationalization?

➔ **With a partner:** Reread verse 9. Listen as if Jesus is speaking directly to you. Are there ways in which you see how this applies to your life?

c. As Jesus exposes the heart of the Pharisees, how do they display the very truth of verses 21-23? How many of these 13 characteristics do you see the Pharisees actually demonstrating by their use of Corban and other traditions which they follow to the letter while ignoring the spirit and intent of God's law? _____

d. As you review this list, which evils represent thought; which ones represent action? Read Matthew 5:21-30. What is Jesus teaching in this section of The Sermon on the Mount about thought verses action? _____

– David's cry in Psalm 51, especially verse 10, expresses what he has discovered has "come out" of his heart. How does this Psalm relate to what Jesus is trying to teach His disciples? _____

➔ **With a partner:** Review this list of behaviors and attitudes which "come from inside and make a [person] unclean." Pick one with which you have struggled in your personal history. Do you agree with Jesus that it has made you "unclean"? What does "unclean" feel like? Is it important to know you are "unclean" before God?

➔ **With a partner:** Look again at Psalm 51, especially verses 2, 7, 10, 17. How have you experienced the cleansing of God from within?

2. Read Mark 7:24-30.

a. Jesus travels north and west into the Gentile territory of the cities of Tyre and Sidon. Even there, Jesus cannot keep His presence a secret. Why? _____

b. Jesus' reply to the woman in verse 27 seems harsh, metaphorically calling her and her sick child "dogs." The NIV Study Bible does indicate that "the Greek says 'little dogs' meaning a pet dog in the home." Read Matthew 15:21-28. How does Matthew's version add insight into this unusual dialogue? _____

c. Read Romans 1:16-17. How does Paul's statement parallel that of Jesus? Where are the woman and child by race in the priorities of the Gospel? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Think of a time when your priorities placed other people before your family. Did that situation diminish your family's importance, or was it simply the unfolding of a necessary sequence in the situation?*

d. Read Genesis 22:18, Ephesians 2:14-19, and Matthew 28:19. What do these verses indicate about Jesus' mission? In the life of Jesus, what events separate His exclusive mission to the Jews alone, and His inclusive mission to "the whole world"? _____

e. How do you think this woman feels when she leaves and her child who has been "suffering terribly" is "healed from that very hour"?

– How do you think Jesus feels? (Matthew 15:28)

– What do you think Peter and the other disciples learn about Jesus' mission, especially since they have complained about her (Matthew 15:23)? _____

3. Read Mark 7:31-37.

a. Once again Jesus travels, south to the Sea of Galilee, and around to its east shore and the region of The Ten Cities or the Decapolis. Of what previous incident does verse 32 remind you? How does this verse encourage you with your needy friends? _____

b. What do you discover about the compassion of Jesus as He heals this man? _____

c. Read James 1:22-25. How can we as Christians be "deaf and dumb"? What connection does James make with hearing? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *In your own life, how well do you hear the Holy Spirit? What connection does hearing God and speaking your faith have? Share a time when you heard the "still, small voice" of God speaking to you. What does Isaiah 30:21 promise?*

- d. Mark 7:37 reads, “He has done everything well.” How does this echo Genesis 1:31? How is Jesus “recreating” this man’s life? How does He do this very thing in each of us as He unstops our ears and liberates our voices to “speak plainly” the gospel of His mission? _____
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Concluding Discussion

How does this series of events underscore the mission of Jesus to hear the word of God clearly? How does tradition make us deaf, and how does blocked hearing make us dumb? How are we encouraged to be persistent so that we may be confident in God’s hearing us?

My Gospel Prayer...

Lord, all my life You have offered to feed me at Your communion table. Just like the prodigal son, before I could even beg for Your mercy, You chose to travel into my darkness and rescue me from filth of great sin. Some of that sin, Lord, is grounded in my distortion of the holy intent of Your Word. Yet, You have cleansed me through and through by Your grace. You are the bread of life, and when I feed on Your love, not only is my hungry heart satisfied, but also I learn to hear and see and speak through the power of Your Holy Spirit. Only when You dwell within me can I speak goodness. Thank you, O Lord, for not withholding Your compassion from anyone in need, including me. Teach me to hear You whisper, “This is the way; walk in it.” I, too, am “overwhelmed with amazement” at Your touch.

Notes:

Sunday, February 3, 2008

The Gospel of Mark

Part 2: "Disciples Discover Jesus' Mission"

"Disciples Discover: The Danger of Hardened Hearts"

Mark 8:1-26

Jesus and the disciples continue their long journey of many months, completing a snail-like loop from Tyre and Sidon (7:24) northwest of Galilee to the Decapolis or Ten Cities east of the lake (7:31) to the western shore in the "region of Dalmanutha" (8:10) and finally across the lake to the north shore and the town of Bethsaida (8:22). The travel time and the many experiences with those along the way give Jesus opportunity to teach His disciples more about His mission and His purpose, both by words and in demonstration. However, His teaching increasingly widens the gap between Himself and the Pharisees and other teachers of the law.

Warming Up: (partners, 5 minutes)

- Can you remember a time when something was very visible to you but you failed to see it, and only with hindsight you recognized it for what it was? Examples might be something significant about a friend or family member, or something important about your work and purpose, or maybe an opportunity or a blessing or an answer to prayer.

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read Mark 8:1-10.

- a. What parallels do you discover between this incident and the previous feeding in Mark 6: 32-44? _____

– What motivates Jesus in both incidents? _____

– What differences do you notice? _____

- b. Read the familiar verse of Matthew 6:33. How do these words especially apply to this crowd of 4,000? _____

c. Discuss the size and logistics of feeding 4,000 people. For example, on Christmas Eve, 2007, the Visalia Rescue Mission served over 1,000 people. L.J. Williams Theater, in downtown Visalia, seats over 1,200 people. In reality, how do 13 men serve 4,000 men? _____

d. Why do you suppose such a large crowd has gathered in the Gentile country of the Decapolis? If you need a hint, review Mark 5:1-20, especially verses 19 and 20.) _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Jesus asks the disciples to give what they have, a meager amount for such a large crowd, but Jesus makes it sufficient. Can you think of something you have given to Jesus which He has used to bless others?*

2. Read Mark 8:11-13.

a. What purpose do the Pharisees have in asking Jesus for a sign from heaven? _____

b. In spite of all their knowledge, how are these Pharisees blind? _____

c. Read Ephesians 1:17-19a. What does Paul mean by “the eyes of your heart”? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Do you think you have ever suffered from spiritual blindness? Explain.*

3. Read Mark 8:14-21.

a. How many examples in these verses can you find which contrast the literal, concrete thinking of the disciples with the abstract, metaphorical teaching Jesus continues to use? _____

b. What emotions do you think Jesus is feeling in this conversation with His disciples? _____

c. What is the “yeast” of which He speaks? How does it relate to His metaphorical reference to eyes? You may want to review 6:14-29 and/or 7:1-23. _____

- Matthew offers a direct explanation of yeast in 16:12.
 - How do the words in I Corinthians 5:6-8 help your understanding?
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d. In what ways have you seen the Pharisees not demonstrating “sincerity or truth” or, as Eugene Peterson in The Message expresses it, not being “simple, genuine, unpretentious.” _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Think of a time in your life when “a little yeast” affected your whole mind set. Examples might include a word of gossip, an advertisement, a brief image from a movie. What happened?*

e. Mark’s narrative continues to be based on Peter’s preaching. How does this conversation on the boat as it crosses the Sea of Galilee reveal an honest, reflective, self-appraisal of spiritual blindness of Peter and his friends at that time? _____

- At the end of his life, Peter, in the words of The Message, writes in I Peter 1, “Don’t lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what you feel like doing. You didn’t know any better then; you do now. As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God’s life, a life energetic and blazing with the holiness....Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God. It cost God plenty to get you out of that dead-end, empty-headed life you grew up in. He paid with Christ’s sacred blood...”
 - How does Peter’s long journey with His Lord ultimately reveal a softened heart, clear vision, open ears, and understanding? How has Peter come to understand the “yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod”? How does his life offer hope for us on our journey?
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4. Read Mark 8:22-26.

- a. Remembering the physically long journey Jesus and the disciples have been taking by foot and by boat, what would it be like to have been part of this group of men engaged in teaching, healings, miracles and travel? If you have ever participated in a mission trip (to Mexico, Germany, Guatemala, etc.), what happens to relationships during such intense travel together? _____

- b. How does Jesus specifically demonstrate compassion in dealing with this blind man? _____
- c. Compare verse 24 with I Corinthians 13:12. As the man gains his physical sight in stages, what does Paul suggest about spiritual sight?

- d. Jesus' mission and purpose is more than miracle worker. Why might He not want the newly sighted man to go into the village? _____

Concluding Discussion

Seeing requires both healthy eyes and a light source. People with 20/20 vision deep within a cave and encased in total darkness can see nothing. What does it mean to have spiritual vision? What light dispels the darkness of the cave dwelling existence of sin? Do you think we twenty-first century Christians still respond to Jesus in a way that He must ask us...

- Do you still not see or understand?
- Are your hearts hardened?
- Do you have eyes but fail to see and ears but fail to hear?
- Don't you remember?

My Gospel Prayer...

Lord Jesus, You who fed the 5,000 and the 4,000, thank you for a Gospel which has fed my hungry heart over and over again. I confess to You that I still come seeking signs, blinded not only like the Pharisees but even like Peter and the other disciples who traveled with you day and night, but didn't understand. I long to see clearly, as did the blind man after Your healing touch. Protect me from the yeast of evil, and let my vision be so focused on You that miraculously I too can learn to "live a life blazing with holiness," to Your glory.

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