

## Sermon on Mark 1.29–39 (David Lakos, St Mark's South Hurstville, Feb 2015)

- In today's reading from Mark's gospel there's something so striking that I want to start with this as we try to open up the message of this section.
  - If I may put it in stark terms, Mark here describes Jesus deliberately turning his back on people in need who were seeking his help!
- You see if you think I'm exaggerating.
  - Mark tells how on a certain Sabbath evening in Capernaum Jesus healed many and released many from the power of demon possession.
  - Very early the next morning he got up and went to a solitary place to pray.
  - The disciples came looking for him and said, "Everyone is searching for you!"
  - Jesus replied— verse 38.
- That is so much the opposite of what we'd expect from him that we must ask what is going on here.
  - Why are all these people clamouring for his help? What is it that they want from him?
  - And why does Jesus turn his back on them? What does he want to be doing rather than helping these people in need?
- Come to think of it, this scenario opens up a question that I'd like to come back to: Is it possible that we can try to 'recruit' Jesus to our agendas, our projects, rather than seeking to follow him?
- I'll use three headings.

### 1. The kingdom of God has come near!

- First heading: The kingdom of God has come near!
- You may realise I'm echoing some words of Jesus which were recorded a bit earlier in this chapter— in fact the first words of Jesus that Mark records.
  - It seems clear to me that Mark introduced his telling of the story of Jesus very carefully.
  - And that careful introduction helps us to see what he's getting at in *this* section.
- I think last week you considered Mark's first summary of the preaching of Jesus— verse 15.
  - The reason I'm taking some of those words as my heading here is that in this section before us we see a **demonstration** of that mighty inbreaking of the kingdom of God in the mission of Jesus.
  - We see it as Mark tells of a healing— verses 29–31.
- We see the powerful inbreaking of the kingdom of God even more dramatically in the next scene— verses 32–34.
- There are those who would say these accounts in the gospels of demon possession simply show the primitive ignorance of those people.
  - They would say we now know what's described here is really mental illness.
- That's a big question; and I can't give anything like a full answer here.

- I would simply observe: the Bible is clear that in the spiritual world we meet not only the **good** work of God, but also the evil, harmful, destructive work of his enemy, the devil.
- I'm saying these mighty works of Jesus are a demonstration of the reality of his announcement, "The kingdom of God has come near!"
  - God's prophets in the OT had promised a time was coming when God would intervene in his world to put things right.
  - They promised that that coming intervention of God would bring healing, wholeness, peace, fruitfulness, restoration...<sup>1</sup>
  - And here it is, in the works of Jesus.
- If I remember my Narnia stories correctly (please bear with me if I've got it confused)...
  - The white witch has kept Narnia frozen in winter
  - The start of the melting of snow and ice shows that her evil power is starting to break, under the stronger power of Aslan
- You could say these mighty works of Jesus are like the melting of snow and ice.
  - His mighty works show God's long-promised, long-hoped-for intervention is under way.
  - Peter's mother-in-law and other sick and suffering people of Capernaum experience God's work of restoration in Jesus.
- Surprisingly, this inbreaking kingdom of God does not sweep all before it, as you might expect it to.
  - Jesus explains (for example in his parables) that the kingdom of God is advancing quietly, humbly— like yeast working quietly in a batch of dough... like seed which produces a fruitful crop here, but not there.
- The glorious triumph of the kingdom of God lies in the future.
  - We still pray, "Your kingdom come."
  - But Jesus urges that **now** is the time to respond! Now is the time to submit to God the king.
  - Repent... believe the good news... follow me

## 2. Everyone is searching for you!

- A second heading: Everyone is searching for you!
  - It seems the people of Capernaum were clamouring for help from Jesus; and who could blame them?
  - Verses 32–33.
  - They have great needs of various kinds; they see that Jesus can meet their needs; why would you **not** bring your needs to him?!
- And it looks like it's just the same next morning— verses 35–37.

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<sup>1</sup> Example: Isaiah 35

- I can't help pausing to notice how Jesus made it a priority to **pray**.
  - Surely the Son of God did not need to pray, did he?
  - What weakness or lack or imperfection did **he** have, that he needed to pray?
- Nevertheless he prayed.
  - He went to some trouble to take time to pray.
  - If he knew he needed to pray, how much more do you and I!
  - How foolish we can be, behaving as if our busy activity is more important, more fruitful, more effective than calling on God in prayer.
- Have you ever heard this saying? “When we work, we work; when we pray, God works.” Perhaps that's a slight over-simplification, but not much.

### 3. Why I have come

- Back to that early-morning scene outside Capernaum.
  - Third heading— verses 36–38.
- Whenever Jesus says, “This is why I have come,” you sense he is saying something very significant about his mission.
  - “**I have come** not to do my will but the will of him who sent me”
  - “**I have come** that they may have life”
- What does he say **here** about why he has come?
  - “Let us go... so I may **proclaim the message** there also; for that is what I came out to do.”
  - He says the purpose of his coming is to proclaim the message.
  - What message? Surely (in broad terms at least) the message with which Mark introduced his preaching ministry— verse 15.
- May I put it like this: This message which Jesus preached claimed his presence, his words, his actions were God's definitive answer to hundreds of years of waiting and longing and promise... God's definitive provision for the need of mankind.
  - **This** was God's great intervention to put things right in his world.
  - The kingdom of God has come near!
  - Hardly surprising that his priority was to proclaim this stunning news— and to call people to respond— “Repent [turn back] and believe the good news... follow me!”
- Does that mean he was not really interested in helping people who were sick or suffering?
  - Far from it!
  - Just keep reading the gospel, and you'll see how much he reached out in compassion and power to people in need.
  - Those works of mercy and power demonstrated the powerful inbreaking of the kingdom of God.
- Yet **this** was central in his mission: to announce that the long-awaited, much-promised intervention of God was now a reality.

## Conclusion

- I'll leave you with two things here.
- One thing takes up from those words of the disciples, “Everyone is searching for you!”
  - It's a wonderful thing that people seek help from Jesus, as the people of Capernaum did.
  - Yet I suggest this story alerts us to the possibility that we can seek to ‘recruit’ Jesus to join *our* agenda and *our* ambitions rather than giving ourselves to follow him.
- A friend of mine has just started in a “Hire a hubby” franchise— an all-purpose handyman.
  - What a wonderful thought— you hire the hubby, and he is your personal genie; all you have to do is rub the lamp and he will carry out your wishes! (At a price, of course!)
  - I take from this story a warning that I must be careful not to treat Jesus as a celestial “Hire a hubby” service, as if he's there to carry out my wishes and make my ambitions come true.
- Certainly our Lord cares deeply about all the needs and concerns of his people.
  - He invites us to bring anything and everything to him in prayer.<sup>2</sup>
  - Nevertheless let's beware of trying to recruit him as our servant for our plans.
- “Jesus, I want you to bless my plans and ambitions for my life”
  - I want you to make me happy... popular... successful...
  - I want you to make my family and friends be more the way I want them to be...
- He might do those things for you.
  - But what he calls you to do is to follow him.
- The other thing that I'll leave you with is a challenge from this glimpse of the priorities of Jesus.
  - “I must proclaim the message [of the kingdom]— that is why I have come.”
  - For him the kingdom of God and the demands of that kingdom were top priority!
- This challenges me about where God's kingdom fits in *my* priorities.
  - In different terms, Jesus calls us to follow him.
- I'm ashamed to think how often things that are utterly trivial and insignificant fill up my thoughts, desires, ambitions, preoccupations— and squeeze out what is most important.
  - Example: how much I was thinking about the new mobile phone
- Now I'm not saying people who are devoted to God's kingdom must despise all the business of everyday life as if it's beneath us.
  - Most likely people of God's kingdom will use mobile phones... go to the

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<sup>2</sup> e.g. Philippians 4

supermarket... join the Probus club... help our children with their homework...

- And yet the words and example of Jesus challenge me to value and desire and seek God's kingdom above all else.
- May I add here: If you don't actually yet belong to God's kingdom, please hear the urgent demand of Jesus— verse 15.
  - Jesus calls you, invites you, to enter his kingdom (by faith in him), and find forgiveness, welcome, security with God.
- In my daily activities, in my leisure time, in my ambitions and desires, I know I need to ask God to grow me in my devotion to him and his kingdom and his glory... and therefore also to grow me in my loving concern for other people and their ultimate welfare.