



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, YEAR B, FEBRUARY 7, 2021
ISAIAH 40:21-31; PSALM 147:1-12,21c; MARK 1:29-39

HIDDEN THINGS: OUR COMPLICIT IN WORLD-MAKING

Mark 1:29-39 [After Jesus and his disciples led the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "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." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.]

Good morning. It's good to be with you today, this last Sunday of my ministry here at Saint Mark's. In February of 2017, I was a newly commissioned vestry member here, serving on the Sanctuary Hub steering committee, and parenting three young kids. Naturally, I was especially concerned to help find someone to fill the recently vacated staff role for a coordinator of Children's

Ministries. Eight months later, I cautiously became that someone. I applied as an interim, just stepping in to fill the gap, I told myself, until someone more qualified showed up. But there was no interim position available. Three and a half years later, I'm pleased to report that many qualified people have showed up, and the interim period is officially over. I'm grateful

for the way you have held up the mirror to me these past years, and allowed me to serve among you in so many ministries. I will miss you. And yet I am also very excited to begin a new chapter at St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in Issaquah.

I feel like I am at Saint Mark's all the time, at least that was true before the pandemic. So were my three children Micah, Leah and Will. But my husband Jacob stays in the background, so much so that you might not even recognize him or know his name. So, I'm glad he's letting me tell you a little bit about him today, as we ease into this gospel about the inner and outer life of Jesus. That's what I want to explore with you today: the hidden things; the inner life.

Jacob is a technology leader and executive manager of developers. That is his day job, the description on his LinkedIn profile. But in the evenings, he loves to work with his hands. He plays the guitar or the piano. He builds things. Most recently, he has turned his attention to working with glass. He takes wine bottles we discard and turns them into drinking glasses. It fascinates me how he sees the glass he can make out of a

bottle that looks to me like it should be in the recycling bin. I've watched as he has honed the practice of cutting the glass, smoothing the edges, and choosing the particular shape and height for each one according to the thickness of the glass, or the design on the bottle. Sometimes a very promising bottle breaks in the process. Sometimes the process injures him, too, a shard of glass slicing through his fingers.

And yet, he persists, and our diversity of drinking glasses at the dinner table is all the richer for it.

When we set the table at home, our place settings rarely match, but they beautifully reflect Jacob's craftsmanship. And you'd never know any of that, unless I told you.

I guess I see similar themes emerging about the divine process of transformation and

healing and telling in the Gospel today. I see Jesus retreating to be alone with God, and then investing in the people around him with a kind of gentle, artistic care that reveal who he is. He does so many things in this passage- teaching with authority, healing people, praying alone-but among all of these he articulates his calling most clearly when



he says: “*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.*”

Now if I had to summarize what “the message” means, at least as it is described in the Gospel of Mark, I would say that it is to reveal that God has come near, and that God’s desire is for the health and healing of all people. Not “the people,” an undifferentiated mass of humanity healed through some trickle-down process from Temple, but the health and wholeness of each person. In Jesus, we see a God who engages with individuals in such a way that they themselves can testify they have been known personally by the Incarnate God. Then, they become the ones who proclaim the message in beautiful and visible ways we’d never know otherwise.

It’s important to note that this kind of delegated divine revelation was a shift from the religious system at the time. Since the reign of David, the Hebrew people would make the journey to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship and atone for their sins.

But Jesus says God is coming to them – to the towns where they live. And God is going to engage with children and Pharisees alike about the details of their private lives – their work and house chores, the daily routines they know intimately, and the people they tangle with regularly. He builds the message

of the Gospel around them – right there in their own homes, so that they themselves become *the Temple* – the places of transformation and holiness that bear witness to God’s nearness and desires.

Here is something else worth noticing: Jesus teaches and heals people in the midst of their present circumstances, *but he does not save them from those circumstances*. Simon’s mother-in-law, for example, is healed, only to return to her life in the background. She is not named, or given voice¹, and if I am honest, that omission *really* bothers me. I want to say, “that is not complete healing, Jesus! It’s the system that is broken and must be healed.

So, what about the healing of the larger system? Does Jesus not care about the Roman occupation, or Herod, or the way in which the Pharisees and Sadducees lord over the Hebrew people? What about the way that women, slaves or even other men, are subjugated by a particular style of toxic masculine dominance?²

I’m sorry to say that in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says painfully little about that. Instead, he quietly prioritizes those at the bottom of the social structure through his ministry of nearness. He touches them, he teaches them,

¹ Exegesis for this homily was supported by the *Women’s Bible Commentary, Third Edition*.

² A question posed in the book, *What Are Biblical Values?* by John Collins

he heals them, and then *he trusts them* to continue the spread of the message. It's as though he, the one with unspeakable power and authority, is deferring to them and their unique ways of revealing God's nearness right there, in the present moment.

Now, I think we have to be cautious with our interpretation here. Because we know it is not enough to ignore the larger systems that oppress and simply attend to those around us with good intentions. We know that our well-meaning attempts to lift up the marginalized within existing systems of power are rarely successful in making transformative changes. We also know that while the less privileged bear the burden of societal suffering on our behalf, they themselves are not the source of the problem in need of healing.

In many cases, we are. We, the undifferentiated mass of unaware people – we ARE the system. We are the ones who perpetuate the groupthink, hoard the resources, project the problems, and wield privilege and power in a trickle-down fashion. Sometimes I think “we” become so consumed with all that is wrong with the world that we lose our vision of each other as unique and holy human beings. People become problems to fix or abandon, and then the demon of dehumanization *ravages* us.

Perhaps, then, this Gospel is an invitation *to us* to *ask* for the kind of healing that might enable us to hear one another anew, and to proclaim the message differently that we have managed so far-

Maybe for you, this is a charge to speak up with the voice God has given you — to trust that your voice and perspective matter, even if there is resistance to the message, to the way you sound when you speak it, or the words you choose when you proclaim it.

Or, maybe your call is to speak less, get quiet, to listen, and defer to the divine authority given to others, even when it makes you angry, or uncomfortable, or uncertain.

Maybe there is even a third way – one of discerning what tools and internal resources you must cultivate in order to stay the course with Jesus, trusting that both your proclamation and your healing are needed in this world.³

Parker Palmer, beloved Quaker author and spiritual leader writes, “Our complicity in world-making is a source of awesome and

³ A few resources for spiritual practices to support anti-racist work::

1. Christena Cleveland's online course, "[Liberating the mind-body-spirit from White Supremacy](#)"
2. Practices described in the interview with Resmaa Menakem here: <https://onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/>

sometimes painful responsibility—and a source of profound hope for change.”⁴

Discerning our particular layers of complicity and responsibility will take time, prayer, and tools. It will require us to change, both inwardly and outwardly, individually and collectively, at home, and in our communities. That process will be slow, and it might be painful at times. And, *God is not likely to save us from the pain*. But *God will* enter into it with us.

My shared public life with you changes this week. But my commitment to the inner work that I believe the Spirit is inviting us into is only *intensified* from this moment on.

It is a commitment to the kind of liberation that works from the inside out, and *there is no interim position available for this work*.

So let’s do it in parallel, you and me, trusting that our inner work will pool into a stream of outward and visible signs of God’s artistry and care among us. We are the Church: the family of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.⁵ We are each called to share in the renewing of the world in unique and holy ways.

Amen.

⁴ The concept of doing inner work in community is described in Parker Palmer’s book, *Let your Life Speak*. You can access a portion of it here :

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/parker/writings/leading-from-within/>

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⁵From the BCP, p. 531

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