

Epiphany 5 / February 7, 2021

Mark 1:34

“He healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons.”

Are you in a hurry? Are you the type of person who gets annoyed when it takes more than one second for an email you scanned and sent to yourself, to arrive? Do you frequently look at your watch and tap your feet impatiently? Some people approach life with a sense of urgency. If you are one of those people, the gospel of Mark is for you! One of the distinctive aspects of Mark's gospel, apart from its brevity of words, is the urgency of Jesus' ministry and the immediate effect His words have on the world, physically and spiritually. In Mark's gospel, events follow in rapid succession and Jesus' words have an instant effect! When Jesus speaks it is done, immediately and effectively!

Mark begins with John “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Jesus comes for baptism. When Jesus is baptized, He immediately sees the heavens open and the Spirit descend on Him like a dove. After receiving baptism, the Spirit immediately drives Him into the wilderness for forty days, to be tempted by Satan. Mark covers the forty days in two verses, stating the bare facts. Jesus immediately begins to proclaim the gospel of God saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Today is the day to listen to Jesus. Now is the time to believe in Him as Saviour and to confess Him as Lord.

Jesus calls His first disciples as they are fishing. He says, “Follow me.” They don't linger at the docks and think about it. They immediately leave their nets and follow Him. He goes to Capernaum. Immediately He enters the synagogue, where He teaches with authority that leaves His hearers astonished. A man is there with an unclean spirit. The spirit immediately recognizes Jesus and identifies Him as the Holy One of God. Jesus casts it out of the man and it leaves, immediately! The kingdom of God is drawing near. There is urgency in Jesus' words. The time of salvation has come. Even with the passing of two thousand years there is urgency in Jesus' words. Jesus calls us to come to Him now in faith and to believe His words. Today is the day of salvation. He speaks words of forgiveness, spiritual healing and eternal life. Now is the time to believe. There can be no hesitation or delay. He is the Word of life!

Jesus' words have an instant and remarkable effect on the physical world and the world of spirit. When Jesus speaks words of healing and wholeness, there is no delay. Their effect is immediate! He doesn't write a prescription and say “Take one of these in the morning and at bedtime and you should start to feel better in a few days.” When He speaks it is done! The injured are healed. The sick are cured. The disabled are made whole. Those oppressed and possessed by unclean spirits are set free! Jesus doesn't follow an elaborate exorcism ritual when He encounters unclean spirits. He says “Get out,” and they are gone, immediately. His words have an immediate effect on unclean spirits, the human body and the human spirit.

Most importantly, sins are forgiven and the human spirit is made whole in a good relationship with the Father in heaven. The four disciples find Jesus early Sunday morning and they say tell Him, “Everyone is looking for you.” Jesus won't delay. He says, “Let us go to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” Jesus came to proclaim the good news of forgiveness. Jesus came to preach the gospel of God's righteous reign in the human heart. God reigns in our hearts through Jesus' words. We listen to Jesus' words. Their power is divine and their effect is immediate and beneficial, both to our bodies and to our spirits, in time and for eternity!

Wholeness, healing and forgiveness are so immediate that they happen without Jesus even saying a word. Following the synagogue service, Peter brings Jesus to His home, where they find his mother-in-law laying down, stricken with a fever. Mark's gospel is interesting in that Jesus doesn't say a word. He simply takes Her hand and raises her up. The fever is gone and she is well. Mark's point is that Jesus doesn't need to say a word. He is the Word. He is the gospel message. Jesus came to proclaim the gospel of forgiveness and the healing of the human spirit in relationship with God, through faith in Him! He is the embodiment of the grace of God. He comes to us with healing in His heart, healing on His lips and healing in His hands!

People came to Him for healing and He healed people of various diseases and ailments of body and spirit. But the primary reason Jesus came was to preach the gospel of spiritual healing in relationship with God through forgiveness, received through faith in Him as the Holy One of God. Realize that every person Jesus healed of a physical illness or infirmity, later again became ill, infirm and ultimately died. Even those who received the most astonishing healing of resurrection from the dead, eventually succumbed to death again. Jesus healed the body in

time, so we might perceive His power to heal the spirit and the body, eternally in the forgiveness of sins and give life everlasting to all who believe in His name and receive baptism into His death and resurrection.

When Jesus forgave people's sins, He gave a greater healing than when He cured a fever, made the blind see or the disabled walk. When Jesus forgives us, He gives a greater healing than when He called the dead to rise and come out of the grave. The healing of the human body foreshadows the greater healing of the human spirit. But it's our nature to put greater emphasis on the physical than on the spiritual. People value the wealth of gold and silver more highly than the riches of forgiveness and eternal life. When Jesus called a rich young man to sell his possessions, give his wealth to the poor and to follow Him, saying He would have treasure in heaven; the young man would not follow Him, He preferred riches in time to treasure in heaven.

It wasn't just him! It is our sinful nature to value more highly things we can touch and see (even though they pass out of our hands with time) than the unseen things of God that are eternal. But as Jesus said, "What does it profit a man if he gains the world and loses his soul?" Jesus came, so that we would see there is no greater gift than forgiveness and no greater treasure than eternal life; received through faith in Him. Jesus came, so we would receive the treasure of heaven in forgiveness and the promise of eternal life in the presence of God. Jesus' words have power to impart the blessing of forgiveness in time and to give life in eternity to all hear. We listen to Jesus, so we would believe by the power of His word and have life in His name, in time and for eternity!

Jesus healed, because there is compassion in His heart. Jesus healed without a word, because there is power in His hands. Jesus healed people who suffered from all manner of illnesses, ailments and afflictions of body and spirit. But the greatest healing Jesus gives is the healing of our spirits in relationship with God, through the forgiveness of sins. One of his most devoted disciples was Mary Magdalene, from whom He cast seven evil spirits. Consider the difference He made in her life. Imagine the peace and relief that His words brought to her soul; body and spirit. The most evil spirit Jesus casts out is the unclean spirit of our own sinful nature, which leads us to doubt God's word, despair of His grace and stray from His commands. He casts the unclean spirit out of us through the Holy Spirit, whom He gives to dwell within us by the power of His word in the water of baptism.

Jesus casts out the unclean spirit within us, whenever we return to the promise of our baptism in repentance and confession, praying with King David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me." He casts out the unclean spirit within us, as often as we receive the gift of His holy body and precious blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus' words give forgiveness and impart the Holy Spirit immediately and effectively. When He speaks it is done! St. Paul writes, "If anyone is in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come." All who receive Him receive all His blessings and benefits; immediately and completely! He heals our spirits in time in the forgiveness of His cross. He will heal our bodies and spirits fully and eternally, when He returns as Lord and King; and calls us to share in His resurrection to a new and everlasting life. His words are truth and life. He will certainly do it. Believe it! In His Name. Amen.