

MARK 1:29-39

Introduction:

- John Ortberg, a Presbyterian Minister, tells of reading Psalm 150 in his large congregation. It was a last minute decision so he was reading it cold.
- “Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament.”
- And so the psalm builds from one praise sentence to another, Ortberg says that his voice built in a steady crescendo only to slightly mispronounce one word.
- “Let everything that has breasts, praise the Lord”
- There was a brief silence, after which the congregation simply erupted in laughter.

Moving Beyond Gender to Community:

- On a surface level one could assert that this is merely a scripture lesson of male chauvinistic religion.
- Jesus enters the home of Simon Peter, heals his mother-in-law, then the boys settle in for the afternoon rugby match while Peter’s mother-in-law serves them beer and snacks.
- A tempting interpretation... but one that falls if we are prepared to dig beneath the surface.
- As we explore the text, we are reminded that it is Jesus who initiates the service, immediately upon hearing of Peter’s mother-in-law.
- Jesus is living out the discipleship of service and building up community, indeed, later in this Gospel Jesus asserts that he has come, “not to be served, but to serve.”
- Interestingly, the word that Mark uses for the mother-in-laws service, is the same word from which derive the word deacon, which can also be translated ministry or service as we have it.
- This service is not an end in itself, but is aimed at the building up of community

- Roger Grench: “All of the healing stories in the Gospel of Mark are less about healing than they are about building up, or the restoration of, a person to community. To be sick, then as today, is to be isolated from community and communal functioning, and that means isolation from being fully human.”
- Yet it is this wholesome desire for community which can be so easily derailed!
- We so easily establish unwritten rules for who is in and who is out.
- I think that as humans, one of our deepest longings is to be included and accepted, to make it into the “inner ring”. Yet, ironically, in our quest for acceptance we are prepared to exclude and marginalize others.
- Jesus worked tirelessly to facilitate this spirit of acceptance and reserved his harshest words for those who marginalized and sidelined others.

Moving Beyond Ease to Discipleship:

- Lectio Divina (read, think, pray, do) with the Youth on this passage.
- One of the points raised was Jesus' humility; he does not allow the demons to say who he is, he does not stay to receive the adulation of the crowd after the display of God's healing power.
- The question then becomes why? Why does Jesus seek to conceal his true identity, is it merely humility? What is the reason for what scholars call the messianic secret?

- It may be useful at this point to remind ourselves of the context in which the gospel writer of 'Mark' wrote.
- Scholars differ, but generally date Mark around "60CE". We can be certain that the gospel of Mark is written to a suffering church, possibly under the persecution of the Emperor Nero.
- What is Mark's message to this suffering church; the narrative in the first half of the gospel races through the birth and life of Jesus.
- Mark displays an urgency to get through these aspects, hence the repetition of the words immediately in the passage read today.
- Suddenly the narrative slows dramatically as the gospel writer deals with the passion of Christ.
- The gospel writer insists that the healings of Jesus cannot be seen in isolation without the cross that dominates the landscape of the gospel.
- Thus in speaking on our passage on the theme of the messianic secret:
- Dutch Proff. Eduard Schweizer: "The time for proclamation has not come, since the secret of Jesus will become really apparent only on the cross, and one must follow him in the way of the cross to be able to really understand it."

Conclusion:

- The questions on and about suffering and evil remain difficult to answer and indeed in many instances there seem to be no answers.
- However in the midst of suffering, the gospel writer points his audience to the cross of Christ, to the suffering servant.
- This 'answer' is no less valid in our day!
- I believe that as we explore the suffering of Christ we are able to confront our own sickness, brokenness and wounds.
- May the Power of Christ visit us anew and bring healing, wholeness and a real sense of community to us all!
- In the Name of Christ. Amen.