

Mark 1 vv 14-34

Sunday 11th April 2021

We're continuing to look at Mark's Gospel this afternoon: verses 14 to 34 of chapter 1. Last week we looked at the first 13 verses of chapter 1 where Mark, who is believed to have received most of his facts from Simon Peter, starts by making it clear who Jesus is – He is the Christ or anointed one, and that He is the Son of God. He rapidly moves on to reveal that Jesus is fulfilling the prophecy that another Elijah will come first before the Christ or Messiah came. In the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, it says in chapter 4 verse 5 **"See I will send the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes"**. John the Baptist who was a cousin of Jesus was the Elijah referred to in the prophecy. Throughout the Gospels, which were addressed to Jewish men who knew the Scriptures, reference is made to prophecies about the Messiah. Jesus began his ministry first by being baptised by John, and an audible voice from heaven was heard by all the bystanders, as a dove descended **"You are my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"**. Then Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days and was tempted by the devil... more detail on this is found in other Gospels, which establish that the devil is in charge of the world.

One other thing for anyone who's new: we have been praying about what it is that we should do here in the chapel. The feeling many of us had is that God is calling us to do something and we should start with worship, as a foundation for all we do.

That was last week.

Verses 14-15 Jesus announces Good News

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the Good News of God. "The time has come: the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News"

This week the story continues when John the Baptist is put out of circulation: imprisoned. Other Gospels tell us why he was imprisoned, but what is important for Mark, is that he wants to tell us is that Jesus's time had come. When one man is silenced, God raises up another so that the Good News continued to be preached. John the Baptist's message was a gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins coupled with baptism under water. Jesus's message is a gospel of the kingdom of God which is at hand. Verse 15 **"The time has come: the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News"** Repentance is turning away from sin; recognising sinfulness; recognising the need for mercy. Psalm 51:1 says **"Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to Your great compassion blot out my transgressions."** The Israelites recognised that God forgave because He is merciful. Matthew Henry puts it clearly *"By repentance we must give glory to our Creator whom we have offended; by faith we must give glory to our Redeemer who came to save us from our sins. That gospel remains true today: Repent and believe in Jesus... and live a life of repentance and a life of faith."* Our God is a holy God, in whose presence no sinner can stand. The standard of holiness is perfection, and no one is perfect. God's standard is revealed as a hard truth which we cannot avoid recognising. The Bible says **"there is no one righteous, not even one... there is no one who does good, not even one."** Romans 3:10&12 and Psalm 14:3 and Psalm 53 :3. Does that sound true to you? Stating this will have people question that surely there are good people who do good.

We live in a time when so many people claim that they are "good people" and when they aren't good, they justify themselves as having made some mistakes, but overall, ignoring the mistakes, they remain good people. Can we airbrush our wrong doing from our lives and claim that only the good things we've done are on the record as it were, and people should judge us on those good things and ignore all the rest? We Christians acknowledge that we are sinners... sin is a word that makes people feel uncomfortable as it is seen as judgmental and unkind to confront others with their shortcomings – especially as they will challenge us with ours! As Christians we have to be open about our failings and that we are sinners who make mistakes and do things that are wrong, foolish and unkind: we aren't perfect "goody-goodies". None of us is perfect:

only Jesus was perfect and free of sin. The good news is that Jesus is able to forgive our sins. We shall see later that the religious leaders of the Jews were mightily offended that Jesus forgave sinners because only God could do that. Verses 1 and 11 of chapter 1 of Mark's Gospel says Jesus is God's Son, establishing Him as God. Throughout the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, each writer testifies that Jesus is God: an equal part of the Holy Trinity: Father God, Jesus the Son and Holy Spirit.

Mark establishes Jesus's ministry is one of teacher: a teacher of Good News of the Kingdom of God. He called "rabbi" in the Gospels, which means teacher. To be a teacher, you need pupils. Jesus came to teach us how to live and He needs people to tell others when He will no longer be around. The trainees Jesus wants to train are His disciples.

Verses 16-20 Jesus calls His first disciples

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

In verses 16-20 Jesus began to gather His disciples, the men who would become fully trained to pass on the Good News of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus started in Galilee. He chose fishermen, saying to Simon (who was later called Peter.. which means "rock") and his brother Andrew: **"Come follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men"**. At once they left their nets and followed Jesus. Later he met two other brothers, James and John, sons of Zebedee, calling them to follow. These two left their boat, their father and the hired men.

These were four fishermen, not scholars or anyone special, but what you might call these days self-employed small businessmen in a precarious trade because we know they often went out and caught very little or nothing, they worked nights, and had no fixed incomes or salaries. But at other times, they caught a lot of fish, and had plenty to sell.

The parallel meaning of "fishers of men" indicates right at the start of Mark's Gospel that there would be times when the nets would be cast into the waters, and the catch would be nothing. Time and time again nets might be cast and not a fish was caught or just one or two. At other times, hundreds of fish would be caught. So it would be with those who preach the Gospel... sometimes no one would respond, and at other times many people would respond.

So why did these men just drop everything to follow Jesus? Some background is needed: the Jewish way for centuries is that famous teachers had followers: these followers were usually young scholars who sought out the best teachers. In order to gain admittance to the school of the teacher, the teacher would choose only the brightest and most able and send the rest away. The Rabbis (the teachers of the law) in the days of Jesus and for centuries afterwards did not go out into the countryside or towns and just pick on some likely lads from a farm, the sea shore or off the street, saying *"Come follow me"*. That is the equivalent of a city solicitor or stock broker approaching a deliveroo cyclist or a postman on the street, saying *"You've probably heard about me and that I'm good at my job: come and work for me, because I'll train you so that you will be able to do what I'm doing"*. God does things in counter intuitive ways. In Luke's Gospel, chapter 5, Jesus has already healed Simon's mother-in-law and had preached at Capernaum, before calling Simon (Peter) to follow Him. After catching nothing all night, Jesus tells Simon to sail out into deeper water and cast his net over the side. There is a huge catch of fish and it takes Simon, with James and John to haul in the catch which almost sank their boats. Simon and the others recognised Jesus was special and believed He was the Messiah. Simon (Peter) had a brother Andrew who in John's Gospel was a follower of

John the Baptist, and was with John who said on meeting Jesus “Behold the Lamb of God”. Andrew then went and told his brother Simon that he had found the Messiah. All the Jews thought the Messiah would be a great leader, and that the Roman rule would be cast off and Israel would be free again. The disciples later on argued about who would be greatest in Jesus’s kingdom, and it seems that they still had the notion that following Jesus, who they recognised as a miracle working teacher, would give them power and position. Mark doesn’t explain any of this or why the disciples joined Jesus but other Gospels make it clear that these fishermen already knew that Jesus was no ordinary man.

Many Jews at that time had a thirst for God as was revealed by the crowds who were baptised by John. Even the ordinary people had this belief that things weren’t right in the land. Israel was being ruled by the Romans, an occupying power ruled by those who worshipped other gods. Israel was meant to be a land of milk and honey, independent and special, protected by God. Moses and the prophets said that when people worshipped God, obeyed His commandments and turned away from their wicked ways, their land would be blessed. (Exodus 28, Jeremiah 29 & 33). About 200 years earlier the Maccabees had gained independence from their Greek conquerors for Israel and set up a Jewish kingdom. The temple was rebuilt by King Herod the Great 25 years before Jesus was born and everything seemed to be going well until the Romans arrived shortly before Jesus was born. The people of Jesus’s generation had parents who lived in an independent Jewish state and they were wondering what the Jews had done to deserve being conquered again. People recognised their sinfulness and sinfulness meant God would stop looking after Israel. In Luke’s Gospel 5:8 Simon Peter falls at Jesus feet after the huge catch of fish is hauled in and says “**Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man**”. After that he is called to be a fisher of men.

Application

What do we learn from the way Jesus calls His disciples? We learn that Jesus chooses ordinary people who want to follow Him, which means obeying all He has commanded. This means all His commandments revealed in the both the New and Old Testaments. As the church fathers declared centuries ago, we are to obey all the Old Testament commandments that are moral, while the observance of dietary, sacrificial and festival “laws” given by Moses to the Israelites can be set aside. For us today, Jesus is able to use anyone who accepts Him as Lord and Saviour. He is able to provide all believers with gifts so they can share their faith in Jesus and act as men and women who love their fellow human beings. No disciple of Jesus needs to be clever, to be especially wise, to be good looking, to be extravert or good at public speaking. Jesus looks at our hearts: what is our attitude towards God and our fellow human beings? Remember the first commandment of the ten commandments is to “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*” (Mark 12:30). Loving your neighbour as yourself is second, but too many forget obeying the first commandment enables us to have the willingness to obey the second.

Verses 21-28 Jesus drives out an impure, unclean, evil spirit

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ‘What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!’ ‘Be quiet!’ said Jesus sternly. ‘Come out of him!’ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, ‘What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.’ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

After gathering Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John, Jesus went to Capernaum, on the north west shore of the large freshwater lake which we call the Sea of Galilee. There on the Sabbath, Saturday, when Jews met to worship together, Jesus began to teach them about the Kingdom of God. People were amazed because He spoke with authority, unlike the religious teachers of the Law of Moses, who were probably rather boring, unoriginal, merely quoting what others had culled from the texts, and probably pretty smug about their head knowledge of the Law and their compliance with it.

What was different about Jesus's teaching? Jesus knew what He was talking about rather than sharing the thoughts of others. Jesus believed what He was talking about rather than saying what others believed. Jesus knew what He was talking about because He knew the mind of God. Jesus was throughout His ministry, modelling how men should live in obedience to His Father, God. Jesus was telling people that the Kingdom of God was a place where men's hearts and minds were focussed on God, loving God and obeying His commandments willingly rather than grudgingly. The kingdom of God is a place where what you did that was wrong could be forgiven. The same Gospel exists today: Repent, (*which means decide to turn away from doing things that are wrong, such as telling lies, envying others, not loving people or loving God, not honouring your parents, stealing... even if it's helping yourself to stuff from work that you think won't be missed, using the name of God and Jesus as a swearword*)... and make that decision to ask for forgiveness from Jesus. Believe that Jesus will forgive you and believe that He is the Son of God who died on the cross and rose from the dead, and that He is alive today. The Gospel is the call to repent, to believe, and live a life of repentance and a life of faith... that is belief that Jesus is the Son of God.

At the time Jesus walked the earth, the Jews were looking forward to the Messiah who they thought would be a king, like King David or King Solomon, and that the Messiah would throw out the Romans by force and establish a new kingdom. There were several rebellions against Roman rule, and every rebel leader wanted soldiers as well as supporters with money and provisions. The Romans crushed all revolts brutally, and the last revolt some 40 years after Jesus was crucified was the most brutal of all. It resulted in Jerusalem being besieged and then reduced to rubble: thousands were massacred.

Jesus was different: He wanted ordinary fishermen to spread His message of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of men and women who were loving, peaceful, joyful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self controlled. Jesus was nothing like the arrogant self-righteous religious leaders of the Jews, and nor was He a freedom fighter leading soldiers willing to kill the Romans. Jesus talked about what you needed to do to get close to God, who loves all of us made in His image. Jesus was talking about His Father in heaven who He knew and who He wanted all of us to know as well. Psalm 46:10 says "Be still and know that I am God". God knows each of us... but He wants us to know Him and for us to spend time in His presence and for each of us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

As part of Jesus preaching His Good News, there were miracles. Jesus wasn't a miracle worker who sometimes preached, but a preacher and teacher who sometimes did miracles to demonstrate the love, power and glory of God. It was at Capernaum that a man possessed by an unclean spirit who was in the synagogue issued a challenge as the spirit inside him recognised Jesus. **"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"**

Some background: do we today recognise that people can be possessed by evil spirits? Hollywood does, but does the medical profession? If you have no belief in the existence of God, that men have souls that live on after they die, that evil in the world comes from the devil, then you will have a problem with this record of what we Christians believe is factually true. Even atheists believe there is good and evil, but they have no yardstick to determine which side of the divide is good and which is bad without a moral code. The

moral code in the Bible is set down by God so that we may live together in a society where love prevails. None of our secular laws mention the word “LOVE” in them: they all say that there are things that will be punished if we do them or fail to do what the law says we must do. The first of the ten commandments is “Love the Lord your God”. As I’ve already said, all the others flow from this first commandment. God recognises that love – seeking the best for others and yourself without harming others or yourself – is the foundation for communal living. The Bible tells us how sin came into the world, when Eve was tempted by the devil. Today plenty of wicked people claim that they hear voices in their head telling them to do wicked things, and no one sees anything odd about that. However, no one can explain why they hear these voices. Every society until the last hundred or more years knew about the spirit world and that evil spirits exist, but because science cannot measure the supernatural, it turns a blind eye towards what it cannot explain, and wishes it away. That sets the scene for this part of Mark’s Gospel. We know (I say know rather than believe because belief can be about faith, while knowledge is based on the reality of human experience... even experience that science cannot explain) --- we know that the devil can possess, or control, your mind and your actions, and in this case, the evil spirit recognises Jesus and calls Him Jesus of Nazareth – a name designed to mislead people. Why do I say this? All the religious leaders knew that no good thing ever came out of Nazareth because it is not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament and no prophet or Messiah could come from there. The Hebrew mindset was such that if something was not mentioned in the Scriptures, then nothing positive could be said about that subject! We take it as read that it is a logical fallacy that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. It seems odd to us that this was repeated by the Pharisees time and again, but it was useful to the devil, and the religious leadership who hated Jesus, to call Him “Jesus of Nazareth” from where no good thing could come. The Messiah would be from Bethlehem... exactly where Jesus was born!

The evil spirits also know that if they were removed from a person, they would have to go elsewhere, which was worse, so they asked “have you come to destroy us?” They wanted to be left alone.. the devil wants to be left alone and not have his evil ways challenged by anyone. They also knew who Jesus was – “the Holy One of God” Last week there was a brief mention in verse of Mark that Jesus was in the wilderness 40 days tempted by the devil.. Satan, who knew who He was, but not what He would do a few years later.

Jesus’s response is swift and stern: “**Be quiet. Come out of him**” which resulted in the man convulsing violently and shrieking loudly. Usually exorcists had to do a lot of ceremonial cleansing, rituals using special words (incantations) and this all took time and effort. Today things are no different. Few genuine exorcists can command a spirit or spirits to come out of a person without saying the right words and prayers. Jesus did it in seconds. Everyone was amazed that even the evil or unclean spirits obey Jesus... and so word spread all through Galilee.

Application

As Christians we all have a testimony of what God has done in our lives and is continuing to do in our lives. We can share what we know, what we experience, what we believe. Casting out evil spirits is probably a tougher challenge. How often do we face anyone so possessed who challenges us in the way the evil spirit challenged Jesus? If the answer is never yet, then praise God we’ve not yet faced that trial. However we need to know what Jesus said and what we must say “**Be quiet. Come out and go to the place appointed for you, in the name of Jesus.**”

Verses 29-34 Jesus heals many

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Next Jesus leaves the synagogue to go to Simon Peter's house to find his mother-in-law is ill. (This is the first mention that Simon Peter had a wife because you have to have a wife to have a mother-in-law... and she is never mentioned by name. Simon Peter's wife is mentioned once in the Bible by Paul 1 Cor 9:5). Jesus takes her by the hand, lifts her up and heals her fever: she recovers immediately and makes the dinner. No convalescence required. This wasn't done in front a large crowd inside the synagogue, but privately in Simon Peter's house. This story is also mentioned on Luke 4:38-39 and Matthew 8:14-15, but again her name is not mentioned. Three gospels mention this healing, and in Mark's and Luke's it is His first physical healing, while the casting out of the demons in the synagogue was the first spiritual healing.

After this, as the sun begins to set, word gets out and crowds gather at the door bringing sick people wanting to be healed. They bring others possessed of unclean spirits and they are freed from that bondage. Jesus told the evil spirits not to mention who He was as His time was not yet come. Jesus had a busy day and was working into the night helping people in need. As soon as Jesus begins His ministry, the people were drawn to Him because He met their needs in a way no one else could.

Today, He does the same: He meets us when we accept Him as Lord and Saviour, and gives us something no one else can: undeserved gifts of forgiveness, love, and eternal life.

Next week we look at Jesus praying by Himself and healing people. Read for yourself the whole first chapter of Mark.