

## STOP HIDING

MARK 9:2-9

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This morning, I have read the gospel from Mark. What you heard may have seemed a little strange for you to hear when you think about what we have normally been taught about the mission of Jesus.

If you read the first part of Mark you find Mark telling us in verse one that his intention in his book is to share with us *“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”* He begins that good news by telling us about John the Baptist and Jesus being baptized by him in the Jordan River. After that Jesus is in the wilderness and is tempted for 40 days.

Mark has a way of moving through the timeline of Jesus’ ministry in quick outline fashion so the next words, after Jesus time in the wilderness, John the Baptist is arrested, then Jesus begins his ministry by calling his first disciples but then is immediately consumed with the physical needs of people. He heals the man of the unclean spirit in the synagogue and as soon as they leave there they go to the home of Simon and Andrew where Simon’s mother-in-law was sick with a fever and he heals her. Now, later that evening many people came to him with various diseases and they are all healed. But early the next morning Jesus went to a deserted place to pray. Not knowing of Jesus plans to do this Simon and others who were with him went out to hunt for him. When they found him they told him “Everyone is searching for you.”

Now Jesus’s reply is one that some people in my bible study classes over the years have been troubled over. He said to them, *“Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.”*

Some have said they would have thought that Jesus would have continued to care for the needs of others before deciding to move on. They suggested Jesus is adopting a first come first served approach to people who for various good reasons could not get in line before Jesus left.

As I said, Mark’s Gospel is known for its frenetic, fast pace. Mark portrays Jesus as inviting his disciples to go with him on a journey. But it is a fast-paced road run, not a leisurely stroll through Galilee.

Mark appears to have joined four episodes together in this week’s Gospel lesson. We’ve already seen Jesus preach, heal, exorcize demons, and pray, but we do not learn much new about Jesus’s main work—why he came in the first place.

What we do notice is one new factor in the ministry of Jesus: popularity. Public opinion of Jesus seems to have moved from the astonishment in the synagogue in Capernaum to great acclaim by the crowd. Everywhere Jesus goes, crowds gather. *“Everyone is looking for you,”* (1:37) the disciples exclaim.

And Jesus’s response to these crowds? Jesus flees the crowd, goes to a deserted place, and refuses to let the demons say in public who he really is. When his disciples say that everybody is looking for him, Jesus heads in the opposite direction.

Why is Jesus bothered by this popularity? Why does he evade the crowd’s acclaim about him?

Mark rarely steps aside from his narration to explain anything to us. We are left to infer the meaning behind the narrative for ourselves. Jesus’ reluctance to be made a celebrity seems to have something to do with his unique mission. He heads in the other direction so as not to be captured or

slowed down by the crowd. He sets forth to preach, saying that's why he has come in the first place.

Perhaps Jesus fears that the crowd misunderstands his mission, misconstrues his Messiahship. Does the crowd hanker after Jesus because they think his is a magical healer? That could be part of the problem. While healing people is good work and Jesus is depicted as engaging in that work everywhere, that is not Jesus's main mission. God's kingdom is more than health and Jesus as Messiah is more than an effective physician.

The crowds have seen enough of Jesus to be attracted to him but not enough to know with any depth the mission in which he is engaged.

This time through Mark's Gospel, two things stand out to me: 1. Jesus is on the move, constantly moving into mission. There's very little given by Mark about the content or substance of Jesus' frenetic preaching and teaching. Everything is in motion, in mission; and 2. If we are to be with Jesus, we must be moving in mission with him.

This Sunday, Mark seems to be beckoning us to an adventure of mission and vocation in Jesus' name. Here is a message about engagement for discipleship that we must seriously consider.

Since Mark moves at such a fast pace leaving out much of what other gospels writers include I would like to call our attention to an Epiphany/Easter story from John's Gospel that I think shares some important details that Mark left out. In John 20:19-23 we find these words:

<sup>19</sup> *When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."* <sup>20</sup> *After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.* <sup>21</sup> *Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."* <sup>22</sup> *When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

It is obviously a sad group, gathered there on the evening of Day One, after the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus—their hope and trust—had been cruelly, humiliatingly, publicly tortured to death. They had hoped he would bring their redemption and liberation. But hope ended when Jesus was crushed under the heel of the authorities, political and religious, betrayed not only by the fickle crowd but by his own disciples. Now they huddled in darkness *"behind closed doors because they were afraid."* Why shouldn't they fear? The same murderous authorities who had crucified Jesus could now be searching for Jesus's followers.

There, as they trembled fearfully, trapped *"behind closed doors,"* "Jesus came and stood among them." Jesus, the one whom they had forsaken in his time of trial, showed up to them in their grief, standing among those who didn't know how to stand by him. He came to them, rather than they coming to him. He opened a door that they had locked.

*Jesus greets his astounded followers,* not with accusation and scolding, which they all deserved, but with his gracious, forgiving, *"Peace be with you,"* which none deserved.

*"He showed them his hands and his side,"* just to prove who he was—Jesus, the resurrected, is also the crucified. And the once despondent, grieving disciples *"were filled with joy."*

To make sure they heard (throughout his ministry Jesus had repeatedly said, *"Listen!"* and they—not the brightest candles in the box—repeatedly failed.), *"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you,'"* disturbing their mourning (John 20:21).

And then Jesus' most astounding statement: *"As the Father sent me, so I am sending you."*

To those who had repeatedly misunderstood, forsaken, and betrayed him, huddled together in

fear behind locked doors, Jesus says, *“As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.”* Us?

*“Then he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.’”*

Upon these disheartened disciples, lamenting their loss, Jesus bestows his Holy Spirit to empower them for his mission of forgiveness. Jesus says he is sending them, just like he has been sent. The word *“mission”* comes from the Latin, *“to send.”*

Earlier, when Jesus forgave a penitent woman, critics scoffed, *“Who is this person that even forgives sins?”* (Luke 7:49). Now Jesus gives his disciples his Holy Spirit to do the very same divine work that characterized his mission. Or as Jesus put it, *“Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these....”* (John 14:12). Us?

Grieving they may be, but Jesus forbids his followers from safely huddling behind their closed doors. Jesus does not come to his disciples and say, *“You guys have had a rough few weeks. Now I want you to take a sabbatical and rest and relax.”* No! Jesus takes them as they are, with their grief and confusion and sends them out to do the same work he does.

After Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection, anybody who wants to follow Jesus is now sent by Jesus, put in motion in mission, thrust into the world, driven by his disruptive, empowering gust of Holy Spirit, to do the same work he has done. His death-defeating, life-giving work is now theirs. His mission (again, Latin, *“sent”*) is theirs by his Easter evening commission.

I’ve got this Easter episode from John on my mind, here in the season after Epiphany, because of this text from Mark. Jesus has just disrupted an otherwise sedate, respectable service on the synagogue. But he doesn’t stay for long in the synagogue; he goes to the home of Simon and Andrew. It’s Mark’s Gospel and Jesus doesn’t stay anywhere long in this gospel!

Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever. What does Jesus do? *“He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up.”* Jesus makes house calls. He doesn’t wait for those in need to come to him; he goes to them.

Again, please note a couple of things about this short episode from Mark’s Gospel: Jesus is always on the move. He doesn’t settle in, settle down, purchase a nice, comfortable building, put up his shingle and wait for folks to come to him. He goes to them, breathlessly seeking out those in need, eager to preach to them and give them the good news. Not only God with us but also God on the move.

Furthermore, Jesus doesn’t travel alone. His disciples are with him every step of the way. They don’t always understand what Jesus is up to, but there they are, bringing those in need to him, letting him know what’s going on in town, heading out with him on his travels.

And, as we found out when we heard Mark’s account of the calling of the disciples, God chooses not to work alone. From the very first, Jesus calls a group of disciples to work with him.

Friends, I’m talking about you, and you, and you. Sure, we are gathered here in church and most of us are seated. But Jesus never leaves us there. There will be that moment when our worship ends and we go forth back into the world, with Jesus. And we know enough to know that’s the real test of our faith in him. Not how well we say the right words or have the right feelings sitting here in church. It’s out there, in the world, working with him.

In our day, a major problem we have in going to world is the same reason the disciples hid in the upper room. We are afraid. There is so much division and outrage even among Christians that we are reluctant to speak up or act in Christian love to our neighbor for fear of being received with

outrage and criticism.

As you know we have been studying a book entitled Christians in the Age of Outrage. The subtitle is *“How to bring our best when the world brings it’s worse.”*

Ed Stetzer the author of the book was asked to become the interim pastor of a 3000 member Baptist church that had managed to bring itself down to 600 people after a split within the congregation on an issue that had nothing to do with the mission to which a church is called.

After a while the church was able to grow back to about 1000 who worshipped in a building designed for 3000. A newspaper in town took note and tasked him about their efforts and he said: *“The key to the turnaround is getting back to the basics of Christianity. That means focusing on sharing their faith and treating one another with respect and love.”*

It also means sending members out to do community service projects.

He said I have been preaching the same message since last Fall. *“We want to be known for what Jesus was known for. We are building a new reputation for sharing and showing the good news of Jesus Christ.”*

On May 1 of 2010 they were having a “servolution” day (as they called it,) at their church, cleaning the baseboards at a local high school. All day long it rained, and it kept raining with 13.5 inches of rain falling within 48 hours with drastic flooding. Their church was located near the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Opry Mill Shopping Center, both of which were inundated with water, but their church was located nearby but was safe. The pastor asked the congregation what they were going to do in response? They decided to become the evacuation site for the hotel. It also became a command center for the city. The event hosted two performances of the Grand Ole Opry because the theater was several feet deep in flood waters.

This congregation, which had earned a bad reputation about how they could not love and hear each other, opened their doors to the community decided they would step into this time to SHOW and SHARE THE LOVE JESUS.

The first Sunday after the flood had ended the church was literally a mess. It was in disarray as the city and other groups were still using it and the church people were still working in the community to help clean up the mess and so they arrived for worship wearing overalls, shorts, and muddy shoes. That day was Mother’s Day, one year after the worst moment in the life of their church which had led to the split.

After a year, the church known for fighting, contentions, and difficult situations where outrage was the rule the church was becoming known for showing and sharing the Love of Jesus in the midst of a broken and hurting world.

Every church and Christian should ask: What are we known for in the community? What do we represent?

And here’s an epiphany for this Sunday: He asks us to go with him. Sorry if you’ve got some health problems, or if the time is not right for you, or if you have too much on your plate already and are not looking for any more responsibilities. He doesn’t care. He calls you, commissions you, sends you anyway.

Now, let’s get busy! Stop hiding!!