

The Weekly Word

October 3-9, 2016

It is OCTOBER... amazing, time keeps rolling along. I pray you are finding time in God's Word, amazing, too. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, October 3: Mark 1- Simply because you are you...

I never noticed this before. In Mark's Gospel the very first time we meet Jesus, the Father is affirming Him as His beloved son. Verses 9-11: *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

At this point in the Gospel Jesus has not done a thing... and yet the Father speaks of how pleased He is with Jesus. ***You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.***

We live in a performance culture. When we perform well, people praise us. Affirmations in our world are usually based on performance. And yet, the Father affirms Jesus before He has done a thing.

Jesus is affirmed by the Father for being, not for doing.

That strikes right to my heart. While I know my parents loved me as unconditionally as humans can, it was always performance that drew praise and affirmation. I cannot think of one time I was affirmed simply for being...

How refreshing it is to listen to the Father bless His son for simply being His son. And I have the distinct impression that our Father God does that for all His children!

God loves me (and you) for being me (and you). Warts and all, God is pleased that I am (and you are) His child.

My heart is melting under the love of the Father.

Oh, Lord, what a wonderful time in Your Word. I am wordless and blessed because I am loved by You and I don't have to perform for Your love. You love me for me, with all my imperfections. You still love me!!!

Love for You, Oh Lord, is welling up inside of me... I am Yours and I have this growing desire to live for You. Oh, God, I pray that my life brings You honor... through Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, October 4: Mark 2- Jesus makes house calls...

The saying of Jesus, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners"* (17) caught my attention.

Jesus, in these parallel statements, equates healthy with righteous and sick with sinners. The suggestion is that if we think we are righteous we don't need Jesus. But if we recognize that we are sinners Jesus is there to help us. The story which provides the context for this saying is the calling of Levi, a tax collector, and a party at his house where he introduces Jesus to his tax collector friends. Jesus is willing to spend time with these folks because He knows that many recognize that they have need of Him.

To this day Jesus remains a doctor to souls... and anyone who recognizes that they need a Savior (a doctor) will find Jesus willing to make a house call.

If you recognize a spiritual need... reach out to Jesus. I am certain that He will come to you as He came to me years ago.

Oh, Lord, show us how much we need You and how willing You are to come and save us. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, October 5: Mark 3- Am I blinded?...

Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. (4-6).

I am struck by how caustic the Pharisees can be. This poor deformed man is healed on a Sabbath and the Pharisees go ballistic. So ballistic, in fact, that they conspire with hated enemies—the Herodians—on plans to kill Jesus!

What a reflection of human nature those Pharisees are... they provide a window into the darker places of the human soul.

The Pharisees were so locked into their human traditions that they are willing to break God's law in order to keep their human laws (which they believed honored God's law). How confused is that?

In order to keep their understanding of Sabbath, they were willing to conspire to kill someone which is a direct break of the 10 Commandments. That's how far off track we humans can become.

I began to wonder if there were places I, too, am so blind? I wondered if there are places where I confuse my human understanding or the way my society understands things that it causes me to break the clear meaning of God's Word? The contextually honest and historically faithful understanding of God's Word must be the bedrock of my life. I must constantly be holding myself up to its standard NOT making my life the standard for God's Word.

In my society hate speech is becoming the norm. Differences in religion, race and nationality are open game for hate speech. Yes, I may disagree with various political views or religious beliefs, but to speak hatefully about them or toward them is a breach of God's Word to not let unwholesome talk come out of my mouth and Jesus' admonition in Mathew 5 about calling someone 'raca', you fool.

So as I watch and listen to the Pharisees, the Lord pierces my soul causing me to look at my own life...

How about you?

Oh, Lord, we can be so caustic as humans... Give me strength to live for You and according to Your ways, not by my human instincts which are corrupted by sin. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, October 6: Mark 4- Is Jesus changing me?...

I tried to imagine what it must have been like for the disciples to learn who Jesus truly was. They sit at His feet all day and hear Him teach like no one has ever taught. The parables were confusing at first but then Jesus explains them. In yesterday's chapter Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, which he knew would spark a flashback by the religious leaders. And then to top it off, today's chapter ends with a spectacular storm calming miracle! Their heads must have been spinning.

I sit and read these events but they don't hit me as if I witnessed them first hand. I have 2000⁺ years of church teaching that prepare me to read the stories of Jesus. Lately I have been reading books about World War 2. I am fascinated and really enjoy these books. But no story, however well told, can be the same as the men who lived it firsthand... men who heard the speeches and fought the battles.

Jesus is doing all these things that disciples have never seen or heard about. It had to be blowing their minds. No wonder it took them a long time to truly believe... their entire world view was being reshaped!

I may not have lived back then, but I have to allow the Lord to reshape my life daily as He forms me into the person who emulates Him in my world.

The thought penetrates. Am I emulating Jesus? Am I allowing His life, love and desires invade my life and change me?

What a great question to mull over during this day...

Oh, Jesus, help me to read Your Gospels with such intensity that they shock me and rearrange my world view and my life. I pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

Friday, October 7: Mark 5- We still need Jesus...

How many people come to Jesus because of need? In this chapter alone we have the synagogue leader and the woman. Need causes us to do good things and bad.

The poor person who is trying to feed a family might steal to get food. The synagogue leader goes to this traveling rabbi and miracle worker named Jesus. Need drives us...

I started thinking about the upper-middle class lifestyle in the USA. We are working so very hard to eliminate need. Much of this is so very good, creating lives where food, shelter, healthcare, education are a given, but, and so often there is a 'but,' as we create these comfortable lives we are lessening the need for God. Human advance provides what former generation sought from God.

In my 21st century life neither Jairus nor the woman with bleeding would have needed Jesus; they would likely have gone to a doctor.

We humans will never be able to eliminate need so the door will always be open to people to look to Jesus.

In my world of plenty, I am wondering how I should live in order to make people, with plenty of material blessings, aware they still have need for Jesus...

Oh, Lord, help me. I am not very successful in showing people who do not yet believe in You, the great joy, blessing and value I have found in serving and following You.. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Saturday, October 8: Mark 6- Can Jesus be seen in me?...

I found myself wondering about Jesus' birth family. Mary we know about and we know she was part of the early Church. James and Judas (Jude) wrote letters included in the NT. But what about Joseph and Simon? Today's chapter and its parallel in Matthew 13 are the only places that these two brothers are mentioned. And sisters only get generically named.

What I was really wondering was if these two brothers and sisters of Jesus became followers of Jesus or not. The clearest answer is that we do not know. James and Jude, as I noted above, not only were believers but were contributors to the NT. But there is not information about Joseph and Simon. Acts 1:14 says, *They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.* But this reference could only refer

to Jude and James, so it is really no help. And his sisters are not mentioned in connection with the early church at all.

So I wondered...

Maybe 'yes' and maybe 'no'.

There are no guarantees. Even in the most faithful of families there is no guarantee that all the family will believe in Jesus. Each person has free will and only by the sovereign work of God in a person's life does faith blossom.

We can share, we can witness, we can live congruent and faith-filled lives that point others to Jesus, but there are no guarantees.

Is it futile to witness then? Absolutely not. As we witness in word and deed we glorify our Father in heaven and it is often our moments of witness that the Holy Spirit uses to introduce people to Jesus.

So I thought... Lord, am I living my life in ways that others see You through my living?

I pray so... how about you? Is your life pointing others to Jesus?

Lord, may my life point others to You. This is my simple pray, prayed in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, October 9, 2016, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.