

**The Weekly Word**  
July 13-19, 2015

Mark is a wonderful Gospel, a faced paced account of Jesus' ministry. Happy reading...  
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

**Monday, July 13: Mark 1- A new era in time ...**

I am breathless reading this first chapter of Mark. In only a few moments Jesus bursts on the scene and before the chapter concludes, He has healed many and may no longer walk around openly because of the crowds. Talk about making a splash, Jesus goes from obscurity to 'the talk of the region' in the span of one chapter.

Given the pace of this reading it is hard to find God's meditation spot, so after reading I returned to the chapter to review and reflect.

My red letter Bible highlighted the words of Jesus so, quite naturally, they caught my attention. And it was the first words of Jesus where I paused to soak in the word of God. "*The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!*" (15).

Those words mark a new era in time... God's time has come. The Lord is about to unfold his marvelous plan of salvation. Isaiah puts it like this, "*The people living in darkness have seen a great light...*" (Isaiah 9:2)

God's time... living in God's time. What a privilege we have... I have. All I have known is to live in God's time. I am truly blessed. In fact, I am doubly blessed because my eyes have been opened by the Lord to the wonders of His time, His kingdom. Thanks to God's invitation, I have repented and I know and live in the reality of God's Good News!

I am blessed and I sit this morning reflecting on God's blessing... His blessing of opening my eyes to who He is and what He is doing in the world today. More than that, the Lord has called me to be part of what He is doing. Like Peter and the others, God called me from a merely earthly existence to be part of His community, which is spreading His name and changing the world for God and for good.

*Thank You, Lord. Bless You, Lord, for Your great call. Thank You, Lord, for reaching down and ripping the veil from my eyes so that I might see You and understand Your call to follow You! My soul sings with joy at Your grace, Your mercy, Your love.*

*My heart sings Your praise as it rests in You, my Lord, my God, my Provider, my Protector, my Savior. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

**Tuesday, July 14: Mark 2- Dining with the sinners...**

*While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (15-17).*

Jesus was making a name for Himself by dining with sinners and tax collectors, people looked down upon by 'good people.' But Jesus didn't care that others thought He shouldn't do this. He simply went where He was invited and welcomed.

Levi, thrilled to be called by Jesus, held a dinner party for his rabbi and he invited his friends. And they came. Jesus was probably the only rabbi to do this. Others would have been aghast to go into a sinner's house. In fact some of the Pharisees made a stink about this. But Jesus put them in their place. *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners"*

I began to think, are there peoples' homes I will not go into because of some kind of prejudice? Are there some people or kind of people with whom I won't associate? Why? Am I afraid what others will think? Am I afraid I will be 'polluted' by contact with them? Jesus maintained His integrity, yet associated with many people that the religious leaders of the day would never associate with. Yes, He risked 'contamination' but it was the only way to meet them and to share with them what God was doing.

Every day doctors and health care workers risk infection in order to care for people who are sick. I think of the brave men and women who went to help those affected by Ebola recently. Their risk saved the lives of thousands, maybe tens of thousands. Shouldn't I do the same, going to anyone who is open with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, despite what others may think?

Today, God is asking me if I have prejudices that keep me from taking the Good News to anyone or any group of people...

How about you?

*Lord open my eyes to the real me. Show me where I need to grow. Show me where I have raised barriers built on race, creed, lifestyle or any other human created distinction in this world. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, July 15: Mark 3- Doing good for others...**

We don't talk about Sabbath much these days. Our language is generally weekends or maybe the Lord's Day. But Sabbath is arcane language for moderns.

In Jesus' day, Sabbath was a big deal for Jews. One day in seven was a day for rest, spiritual renewal and relationships. Sabbath-keeping was one of their 10 commandments and Jews developed many rules to define Sabbath-keeping. The idea behind these rules was to help people know what could and could not be done on a Sabbath. The idea was honorable, but it became a huge burden. And worse, certain things like healing on the Sabbath were forbidden, so people suffered because of the Sabbath... a day meant to replenish and care for people. In God's design, Sabbath was a day of rest to sustain the human body but man's rules had made it a day of bondage.

To this Jesus said, *"Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?"* (4).

I found myself pondering the idea of doing good? Do I create rules or patterns of life that actually keep me from doing good? Like Jesus, do I look for ways to do good, even if it calls me to challenge conventions of life?

In my world it has almost become sacred that weekends are for "me." Serving others on a weekend is unthinkable for many ... it is **my** time. And yet serving others seems like it fits with Jesus' Words better given the very self-centered way many presently view their weekends.

So this morning I found myself pondering doing good to others...

*Lord, I offer my life to You to be a tool in Your hand to help and serve and do good to others. In Your name Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

#### **Thursday, July 16: Mark 4- Kingdom growth...**

I found myself pondering the 3 parables of kingdom growth. The sowing of seed... we never know which seed will bear grain. The farmer has his bag of grain, seed left unsown will NOT bear grain, so he sows in all the fields he has and then he waits. Some sprout and then die off, but others produce incredible yield. The yield more than makes up for the seed lost on the path or rocks. Sow your seed. That is what I am hearing.

Sow your seed and trust God for the growth. The second parable is about the seed growing but the farmer knows not how. When I was in Africa this year I arrived just as the rains arrived and I watched farmers planting. First they removed any large dried residual from the last harvest, then they hand tilled the soil into rows. Finally in rapid motion they moved down each row with a small hand hoe. With one swing they dig a small hole, drop in a single seed and then cover it over, repeating this hundreds, maybe thousands, of times as they moved up and down each hand-tilled row. Rains watered the fields, sun cooked the fields and about one week later I watched as small sprouts pushed through the soil bringing a promise of the harvest to come. It was this picture that Jesus used to say.... after you have sown your seed, you sleep and God does His work germinating the seed to bring its yield.

Finally Jesus taught of the mustard seed, so small yet it produces a plant so big even birds can perch in it.

The kingdom of God is a miracle of God's work. And yet God has designed it that we, His planters, must do our work for God to do His. We must till and plant and God produces the yield.

So after this winding time in the Word, God took me to the place where He asked me, "Bill, are you planting the seed I have given you? Bill, are you doing the kingdom work I have for you?"

And so God pierce my heart with the call of His work.

*Lord, help me to be faithful. Lord, strengthen me for the tasks to which You have called me. Lord, wake me when I slumber, redirect me when I get off Your path. Lead me, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

#### **Friday, July 17: Mark 5- The first evangelist...**

My heart was attracted to this account in the middle of the chapter. Jesus has just healed the man by casting demons out of him that had tormented him for many years. His behavior was so erratic and violent that town's people had chained him in amongst the tombs. He was so strong he would eventually break the chains and shackles. He lived a pitied life among the tombs. After Jesus healed him we read: *As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.*

To want to go with the person who has healed you dramatically, and from such intense afflictions, is understandable. Jesus, however, had a different assignment. *Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed (18-20).*

This former demonized, violent man is sent to his family as the first evangelist on the pages of Mark. Before the 12 are sent out or the 72, before the great commission, this man is sent to tell his family what the Lord has done for him. And the message of Jesus is now circulating in the Decapolis where the man lived.

What a simple plan tell your family what the Lord has done for you. This is something every one of us can do...

Think about it.

*Lord, give me words to express to my family all You have done in and for me. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Saturday, July 18: Mark 6- Faith, healings and miracles...**

It says in verses 4-6 that Jesus had trouble doing miracles in His own hometown due to their lack of faith. *Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.*

I struggle with the place of faith with the miraculous... so rather than run from it, I ponder these things.

How I am picturing my understanding right now is that faith is a conduit between us and God through which God works His miracles. A lack of faith can clog the conduit so miracles don't happen, or as in the case of Jesus in his hometown only a few miracles happen. Faith does not guarantee a miracle, nor does the lack of faith guarantee no miracle. God is always Sovereign; He can knock an enemy off a horse and turn him into a great apostle/evangelist.

And yet faith is somehow generally a component to being used of God and seeing the great works of God.

The sad thing about the account read today is that people missed out on seeing miracles and a demonstration of who Jesus truly was by their lack of faith. In fact, verse 3 tells us some *took offense at him*. This is not only a lack of faith but disdain for Jesus. Ouch. Disdain is a strong word. It seems they rejected Him... to which I say, 'no wonder miracles could not be done!'

After all my wrestling with this idea, I land on my feet crying:

*Lord, I believe... help me gain victory in those areas where some unbelief still lives! Give me the power to believe and to know Your love, which is higher, wider, deeper and more vast than I can possibly imagine. Help me to know Your love... to live in Your love so that I can give away Your love to as many people as I can. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

### **Sunday, July 19, 2015, 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](mailto:office@pcogonline.org).*

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