

The Weekly Word
July 20-26, 2015

Mark continues to speak to me, I hope his Gospel is speaking to you as well. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, July 20: Mark 7- Talking with people about the ways of God...

I was fascinated the way Mark relates Jesus' story to his readers, who are likely mostly Gentiles living in Rome. There are two times where Mark inserts a brief comment to explain a Jewish tradition noted in the NIV by parenthesis. Verses 3-4 where Mark explains the Jewish washing of hands... *(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)* And again in verse 12 where he explains *Corban (that is, devoted to God)*.

As I mused on these brief inclusions, I thought, "Mark is a master at telling Jesus' story to his audience." What I noticed is that when needed he included a brief statement about some cultural item they wouldn't understand, but then quickly returns back to telling Jesus' story in a way that connects with his readers.

This blossomed into thinking about talking with people about the ways of God. Sometimes I get too wrapped up in giving Christian background, correct theology and the rest. I overwhelm them with information about which they don't really care! And what I miss is telling the simple story of Jesus in a way that they can easily understand.

Mark is much more concerned about telling Jesus' story in a way that his readers get it than making sure they have all the correct background. The other thought that hit me is, he spoke in plain language. I have to beware of using "Christian-ese" or "Christian-speak" when talking with people about Jesus who don't know much about Him.

Dear God, thank you for this simple word and instruction this morning. Help me to internalize it and live it as I live for You in my world. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, July 21: Mark 8- Living on Jesus' leftovers...

I suspect that my recent trip to Africa caused me to notice a detail in this story. While in Africa if I couldn't eat everything prepared for me, the staff at the JETS Guesthouse were more than willing to eat my leftovers. Uneaten vegetables, rice, whatever, even part of a soft drink were received with grateful thanks. When food is scarce, all food is appreciated.

In the opening story Jesus feeds the 4000 and after everyone was satisfied, *the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over* (8). I suspect this was what the disciples ate. They distributed what Jesus gave them and then they ate from the leftovers... and it was good.

I am seeing in this account that Jesus invites us to give away what He gives and through the miracle of His grace live off the leftovers, which will provide more than enough for us, his followers, to live on.

This is a radical thought. In truth, I can feel some ‘buts’ welling up inside of me...

But God, what if there isn’t enough?

But God, what if they eat all the good stuff?

But God, it’s mine...

But God...

Truth is, I have to chew on this and meditate on this thought more.

Lord, I am seeing my selfishness as I ponder Your nugget for today. I sing, “I surrender all” but my reaction to my meditation this morning about living on Jesus’ leftovers makes me realize that I am really surrendering less than all.

Show me where I need to grow and how to grow to be more like You, Jesus. In Your name, I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, July 22: Mark 9- Awe inspiring...

I wondered what I would have been like to be on the mountain when Jesus’ appearance changed and a voice from heaven spoke. I suspect I would have been frightened and confused. Nothing in the story indicates that Jesus prepped the 3 for this event. It just happened.

This is the kind of a scene you see in a sci-fi movie, where the person morphs in front of you into something different. It would be scary. At least that’s what I think as I read this account.

Then there is the appearance of Moses and Elijah. Then the voice from the cloud. I would have been babbling nonsense like Peter or petrified silent like James and John.

As I think about this scene and faith, I’m realizing there are things about Jesus that are frightening. It not so much like I’m frightened, I might die, as if a gang of thugs just broke into my house. But I’m frightened because I don’t understand this man in front of me whom I know can do things a human can’t do... walk on water, calm a storm, raise a dead person to life, change water into wine. I mean, normal people don’t do these things. And, yet, Jesus did.

I am realizing that there is an awe, a perplexed awe, a fear that I should have for Jesus that is healthy and honorable and right.

These are my thoughts this morning as I sit with text and Savior in devotions...

O, Jesus, help me to understand what I am able to understand, trust and accept what I cannot understand, and always to revere and serve You as my Lord and my God. In Your name, I pray. Amen.

Thursday, July 23: Mark 10- Value of a life...

I was attracted to a brief vignette in this chapter. It begins in verse 13. *People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them (13-16).*

Children’s value back in the day was not equal to that of an adult. Children were lower-value humans. In some ways we have come so far on this issue, but in others not so much.

Admittedly a stretch from this passage, but I found myself pondering how we minimize children in our world. I believe abortion is a cancer on our valuing of children. Many might disagree with me but for me, life begins at conception. Therefore, the so called fetus is a child and should be valued. To steal its life is certainly not valuing.

There are many other ways I see that we devalue the life of a child subtly...

How many of our birthing practices are designed to make the mom more comfortable rather than asking what is best for the child?

How is it that schools continue to begin their day so early, when study after study shows that is not best for children or their education?

Is the advent of preschool really to better the child or so parents can return to their careers?

What about the anesthetizing effect of screens on children?

I realize some of my thoughts may seem harsh, maybe they are... I am simply wondering if we truly value children equally with how we value adults in our age.

If Jesus were coming to town today, wouldn't we arrange daycare and child-friendly activities to keep the children out of the event so adults could have Jesus' time? Isn't that what the disciples were doing? Isn't that why Jesus rebuked them?

Think about it. I know I am...

Lord, how do I devalue people and kinds of people? Open my eyes, Lord. In Your name, I pray. Amen.

Friday, July 24: Mark 11- Seasonal shifts...

The writer of Ecclesiastes observed:

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:...

a time to tear and a time to mend,

a time to be silent and a time to speak (1,7).

For Jesus the time to speak and 'go public' apparently had come.

The last few chapters He has been preparing His disciples, explaining that He would die in Jerusalem. And now some of His actions seem to be pressing or even forcing the issue.

- Riding into Jerusalem in a prophetic crowd stirring manner (1-11);
- Clearing the Temple of the money changers... coupled with the prophetic cursing of the fig tree, a sign to His followers (12-25);
- His more belligerent response to the religious leaders (27-33).

What I see in this is that His time for more declarative action had come.

There apparently was a 'shift of season,' that called for a different ministry style and manner of living and presenting the kingdom of heaven.

This got me thinking about my life and times... I (we) also experience 'shifts of season' that call us to different ways of living. As a pastor there are different seasons for preaching, some require stronger confronting words (I think of Martin Luther King Jr and his non-violent protests to confront our discrimination). Then there can be times that call for soothing comfort or the responding to the questions of 'why' like after 9-11.

Parenting has seasonal shifts as children grow.

Marriages have seasonal shifts...

Evangelism efforts by individuals or churches have seasonal shifts when our manner or words need to be altered to meet the challenges of the moment.

As I ponder all this I wonder if God is setting me up for a seasonal shift somewhere in my life's set of responsibilities.

Jesus understood the times and changed His approach accordingly... do I? Do we?

Thoughts to chew on today...

O, God, may I have wisdom to discern the times and live accordingly. I pray through my Savior, Jesus and I pray this for His honor and glory as well. I am Yours, Jesus. I am Yours! Amen.

Saturday, July 25: Mark 12- Representing God well...

As I am reading and meditating I sometimes wonder why a particular passage leaps off the page and captures my attention. This remains a bit of a mystery to me... how the Lord God speaks to me during my times with Him. Yet, I love and cherish these times... my heart & mind and God's heart & mind wrapped in an embrace.

Today the Lord grabbed me with verses 38-40: *As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely"* (38-40).

My heart cringes under the weight of this morning's strong warning. Religious prominence is a position that the Lord scrutinizes closely. When we mere humans represent God to others, we best do it well and honorably and with integrity...

- Not for personal show... (flowing robes and respect filled public greetings)
- Not for personal honor... (important seats and distinction of honor)
- Not for personal gain... (devouring widows houses)
- Not with hypocrisy... (for show, making lengthy prayers)

My meditations turned these "nots" into "oughts" as I contemplated how religious prominence should be lived. Thoughts went in these directions. We, who represent the Lord God Almighty to others, should represent God well and live honorably and with integrity by:

- Caring for others more than self... (love neighbor as self)
- Honor the Lord God well, no matter what others think... (John the Baptist and his word to Herod)
- Live reasonably and with contentment... (Jesus and apostles none of whom amassed wealth)
- Practice what they (we) preach...

Clearly I have my meditation points and living-action points for today. Thank You, Lord!

Father, God, thank You for drawing me onto Your lap and being with me during the quiet of the morning today. Thank You for this call to integrity. I love You... I am Yours to be used as You wish all the days You allow me to live. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Sunday, July 26 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.

[Click here for a link to my sermons on the web.](#) Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.