

A Thought for Sunday 7th February

Who is Jesus? Who is Jesus, really? Is he just a good teacher, a myth, a well meaning but ultimately ineffective leader? And perhaps for many a more important question is; is he relevant to the busy, 21st century lives we lead? These are all questions we can begin to answer as we explore these 3 thumbnail sketches in Mark 1:29-39.

In verses 29 to 31 we meet Peter's mother-in-law. Luke writes as a doctor, and in Luke 4:38 we hear that she has a raging, high temperature and is very, very ill. That's the opinion of the doctor. At that time, in that place, there was nothing much to do – just keep her comfortable, and wait to see if she lived or died. Now Jesus enters the room. Luke tells us in Luke 4 that Jesus rebukes the fever. *“Go!” “I’m telling you, leave!”* Pause for a moment. Here is someone with a high temperature, a fever so severe the doctor thinks it's unlikely she will pull through. And with a simple word, Jesus expects to eliminate the disease. With just a word. And Mark tells us that it happened – Jesus can do just that.

There's more here about the power of Jesus. Mark makes it clear in verses 32 to 34 that Jesus in healing deals with all the multidimensional aspects of illness and evil as it exists in the lives of the people he encounters. Jesus understands and deals with every aspect – every dimension – of each problem. He heals in every dimension; physical, mental, spiritual. And as he does so, Jesus is showing the world what God's world, God's kingdom, is like. There is no room there for sickness, for evil, for death. Jesus heals in every dimension.

Then, in verse 35, we see Jesus get up very early in the morning and go to a solitary place to pray. This is what's happened; when the people hear that Jesus can heal with a word of rebuke, they all want to see him. And we see that the more pressure Jesus is under, the more he prays. The busier Jesus gets, the greater his prayer.

We don't know from this passage what Jesus prays, but we do have examples of his prayer elsewhere in the book of Mark. Jesus always starts with *“Abba, Father”*. What?? To start a prayer by calling God “Abba” was shockingly intimate. “Abba” was the very first word a child uses to call her father. In Mark chapter 1 verse 11 we've heard God speak of Jesus as His Son, and speak of his infinite love for Jesus. And Jesus in his prayer goes back to the joy and love which is his because of this Sonship. The essence of what Jesus is doing in prayer here is orienting his life around his Sonship. From this Sonship springs the purpose of his work – to offer others that same relationship with God, so we, too, can call God *“Abba, Father”*. Jesus sees prayer as such an essential priority, because He needs to keep God in the centre and to have his whole being oriented around his relationship with God our Father.

In verses 36-39 we hear that Peter and the other followers of Jesus come and find him. These followers have seen great crowds coming to find Jesus, and they're excited. You can imagine them saying to Jesus, *“We can settle down here – the people love*

you! Everyone is looking for you! Come on down, and we'll get some more healing done, and we can enjoy the day."

And Jesus says, "no." The people, the crowds and Jesus' followers, want Jesus to stay here, and meet their needs. They want Jesus to perform miracles and meet their need for health and maybe for food and drink as well. And Jesus says, "no".

Jesus says, *"I need to move on. I need to preach"*. In other words, Jesus is going to meet not only the needs you know you have, but also those you don't. Earlier, in Mark chapter 1 verse 15, we hear what Jesus is preaching – *"the kingdom of God is near – repent and believe the good news!"* Jesus is speaking into a need most people don't even know they have – the need to live life to the full in the kingdom of God. And Jesus says, you need to repent and believe to make that a reality.

When Jesus uses that phrase, "repent and believe", he is asking people to turn around, to change their mind, and trust Him. To turn from what they had planned, to turn away from placing other things in the centre of their lives, and to turn instead to Jesus, trusting Him with each day.

And in declaring that he must preach, Jesus is saying, *"I must meet the needs you don't know you have, as well as those you do know you have"*. We want healing of our bodies, we want the supply of everything our physical body needs. But Jesus lives and acts in the multidimensional world which includes your spiritual needs as well. And Jesus knows the best way to meet those spiritual needs is to enable us to turn to Jesus and trust Jesus and live in the kingdom of God as children of God, children who can call God "Abba", "Father".

Christians are followers of Jesus, and his agenda is our agenda. Multidimensional healing of this broken world involves meeting physical needs – feeding the hungry, visiting the lonely and more. But it also involves meeting the spiritual needs people have – even when they're not aware of them. The need to be loved, to be accepted, the need for security and hope, for joy and peace, for a life lived as God intends, in intimate relationship with God, are all part of the life Jesus offers. These are spiritual needs and in Jesus we can see and experience healing in all dimensions. Followers of Jesus bring that same multidimensional healing to others as we, like Peter's mother-in-law, choose to serve Jesus and others when we've accepted life in all its fullness.

Mother Teresa puts it this way, in speaking of serving others:

"Prayer in action is love, and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the moment. The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions ... Like Jesus we belong to the world living not for ourselves but for others. The joy of the Lord is our strength."



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