

Mark 1:21-39 ²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil {23 Greek unclean; also in verses 26 and 27} spirit cried out, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God!" ²⁵ "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" ²⁶ The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. ²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching-- and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. ²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. ³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was. ³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" ³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else-- to the nearby villages-- so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

“Searching for Jesus”

One of the most difficult times in the work of a minister, (not just ministers I'm sure it's true for any job) is the first week or so of ministry. The one thing they don't teach you in seminary is what ministers do, especially what we are supposed to do as soon as we get in the field. I remember my first couple of weeks in West Virginia as being terrifying. All of a sudden I was getting paid to do something that really had no job description. I was going to have to show some initiative and come up with things to do and hope I met the expectations. I knew I had to write a make-or-break sermon that said who I am and what I hoped to accomplish. I knew I had to meet the key players as soon as possible. That also was stressful for reasons of first impressions. Up here it was a bit different. I had already preached for this congregation and met most of the people. The thing up here was the international move; that stress made the first couple of weeks of ministry seem like vacation.

If you will pardon my paled comparison, Jesus' first week of ministry went a bit different. He didn't need to set up shop. He basically just started walking and talking; proclaiming that the kingdom of God had come near and calling people to it. He didn't have to meet the important people. Soon enough they would have their run in. Instead, he called four fisherman and they left

“Searching for Jesus”

everything to follow him as his disciples wanting to learn who he was and what he was all about. Then they all just went into town, Capernaum, and on the Sabbath they went to the synagogue and he began to teach. How he got the rabbi and the elders to let him just start teaching is a mystery. Then, all of a sudden, a man with a demon started yelling at him on the “who are you and what have you come here to do stuff”. “What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” Jesus tells it to muzzle up and come out of the man...and it did. The people were amazed for Jesus taught with authority.

Immediately after that, the Jesus squad left the synagogue and went to Peter’s house where Peter’s mother-in-law lay sick with fever. He took her by the hand and raised her up and the fever left her so that she could resume her place of honour as headwoman of the house and serve them. Then, the sun went down ending the Sabbath and people started coming from everywhere bringing all the sick and demon-possessed and the whole town gathered outside the door. He healed and exercised not all but many of them. Then early the next morning while it was still dark he went off into the wilderness to pray. Peter and the boys came searching diligently for him. They found him and told him, “Everyone is searching for you.” Jesus oddly responds, “Let us go somewhere else-- to the nearby villages-- so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

Now, if I had been Jesus and had that successful of, that powerful of a first week of ministry, I would have leapt up and got with my boys and headed straight back into town and worked the people up some more all the while patting myself on the back for being such a good and successful minister. I’d be saying to myself “this success is really going to bring me much validation.” But, I ain’t Jesus and it is a good thing he ain’t me. Jesus didn’t come to have a winning ministry of drawing large crowds. Jesus didn’t come to have a thriving ministry of healing people. Jesus didn’t come to have a victorious ministry of casting out demons. He simply came to proclaim that the time had come, the Kingdom of God was indeed at hand and as I said a couple of weeks ago this was a decisive moment in history that required a particular response from people; leaving everything behind and following him.

Jesus’ first few days in ministry was so power-filled everyone – EVERYONE – in Capernaum, the whole town was searching for him that morning, but Jesus didn’t go back to minister to them. Why didn’t he go back? He gives his explanation. He’s come in order to go from town to town proclaiming the gospel that the kingdom of God is at hand and therefore the people need to repent and believe. But still, when all those people were seeking him why does he say “let’s move on”? He could have won a few more followers.

Now I’m going to say something that is going to throw you back a few feet. In fact it will probably make you hurl the contents of your green boxes¹ at me. I think Jesus said that because they were seeking *him*. Okay, everybody all at once now...gasp. Now I’ll clarify. They were seeking Jesus for what he could do for them rather than hearing his message of the kingdom of God being at hand

¹ A green box is the container that the locals store their compostable garbage in for the town to collect.

and turning to God in faith to do the things of God rather than the things of humanity. They were seeking him wrongly, for their own purposes not his.

There is a huge contrast in Mark chapter one between the four who followed at Jesus' invite, the crowds who were searching for him, and the demons he cast out. The four are with him for the kingdom. The crowds are searching for him for what Jesus could do for them. The demons aren't with him at all and, oddly, it is the demons who know who he is (the Holy One of God) and are also only concerned with what he can do to them (destroy them). The crowds don't really understand who he is but they know he can do powerful things for them. The four disciples, on the other hand, are simply learning who he is and what he has come to do and, unfortunately, through the whole of Mark's gospel we find them largely misunderstanding him. That puts us in good company. If you're ever feeling like you're a Christian failure (I know I spend quite a bit of time in that mindset), just read the Gospel of Mark and you will see that you're not alone. That's good news. We don't have to get it right we just have to come along and let Jesus do what Jesus does.

So, the lesson for today is about the appropriate way of searching for Jesus and also the appropriate response to Jesus. Jesus came to first and foremost announce that the kingdom of God is at hand and to call people to it. Another way of saying kingdom is God's governing reign, his putting things to rights reign is at hand. The primary way God's reign breaks into this world is through people becoming disciples of Jesus and thus turning to God in faith to do the things of God rather than the things of humanity. Disciple is the key word.

A disciple is a student, a learner; someone who has made it their life's task to learn and embody the teachings of another so that they may in turn share and teach these teachings to others. Like apprenticeship, discipleship begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The first disciples had it kind of easy. Jesus was physically present with them. For us, we're more like they were when they were searching for the praying Jesus out in the wilderness in the early morning dark. Incidentally, praying for us is what Jesus is always doing now as he sits at the right hand of the Father (Rom. 8:34). The Holy Spirit does this as well (Rom. 8:26-27). In fact, we could say that our experience of God in the Holy Spirit is that of the prayer relationship between Jesus the Son and God the Father. But that's deep thinking. Let's go back to the searching.

The word in Greek that our pew Bibles simply translate as Simon and his companions went *looking* for him is a bit more aggressive than simply looking for him. They're hunting for him, searching diligently in the early morning dark in the wilderness. “Where's Jesus? Where's Jesus? We've got to find Jesus?” Put yourself in their shoes for a minute and feel that anxiety of needing to find him. I suspect you are similar to me and for me I spend a lot of time feeling like Jesus is out in the desert somewhere and I can't find him. But, the disciples having been the ones called by him, they found him. We too as those whom he has found and called also find him when we search. So how do we do this searching?

Well, personal devotional time is paramount. But, I understand it is a struggle. For me, being a father is great especially when William is this little toddler learning everything. Now, there's another one on the way. These are

“Searching for Jesus”

special days for Dana and me, but I do have to say that one thing I’m looking forward to after the kids start sleeping through the night is being able to get up again in the early morning hours when it’s still dark to pray and read the Bible. Now I have to struggle to find that time and I miss it.

Another thing, I’m looking forward to getting back outside to run here in a couple of weeks. One thing I like to do on my runs is take a verse of scripture and just keep repeating it over and over again in my mind. A couple of years ago I did that with the Sermon on the Mount. There are about 111 verses in it and daily I did that with a verse. Jesus taught me so much in those few months about himself as being non-judgemental and forgiving. I came away with a deeper understanding of grace. All I did was keep repeating the verse over and over on the run as best as I could and sooner or later a thought would pop into my head that would just enthrall me. I really wished I had had the discipline to journal it.

But anyway, searching for Jesus is something we do in prayer and Bible reading, in meditating on scripture, in worship, and in things we do together. And like I said, as his called ones when we search we find him. The crowds that were seeking him didn’t, but we do. He’s there. He’s praying. Join with him. Amen.