

Sayin' More Than You Was Sayin'

by Bill Moller (a sermon transcript - Mark 1:29-39)

Canadian musician and author, Carolyn Arends, tells a story in her recent eBook, about a time when she was performing a concert in Erie Pennsylvania. She writes:

I sang a song called "In Good Hands." Afterward, the church's custodian stopped by and said. "When you was singing that song about Jesus' hands, the sun was setting behind you, and it was making them stained glass pictures of Jesus glow. The sound of your buddy's violin was bouncing off these stone walls, and, well, you was saying more than you was even saying."

Scripture works very much in the same manner. It is alive and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to convey more than just the words on the page.

In Eugene Peterson's paraphrase - *The Message* - Hebrews 4:12 read like this:

God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it—no matter what.

The Gospel of Mark was written in a simple, unadorned - sort of Joe Friday, just the facts style. As a result one tends to breeze by details and overlook the richness of the words.

Those of you who have attended the Adult Class I teach or heard me speak in the past know that I tend to ask a lot of questions and when it comes to the Bible, knowing how we got to the passage we're reading - knowing the context of the passage - is essential. So I'd like us to step back this morning, and avoid a myopic perspective. We want to avoid a narrow understanding of Scripture - one focused on just reading the words on the page. Let's try to get a handle on the big picture.

The first thing someone might ask is, "Who is this Mark guy? We all know the four Gospels writers - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We know who Matthew and John are - they were disciples called by Jesus. Most theologians believe Luke was a companion of the Apostle Paul, but who was Mark?"

Biblical scholars tend to point the character mentioned in the book of Acts, verses 12:12, 25; 15:37. He's referred to as "John, also called Mark". He's the disciple who deserted Paul on his early missionary journey, but later became a companion to Peter, and was probably with Peter in Rome during the persecution of the early Christians.

Many believe that the book of Mark is a compilation of notes taken during the times when Peter spoke about the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is also commonly accepted that the book of Mark was written with a Gentile audience in mind - non-Jews - probably the people associated with the church in Rome.

Knowing that Mark's audience consisted primarily of Gentiles, helps explain the opening of his book. Starting in verse one he lays his cards on the table. It reads:

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" — "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

In those brief phrases Mark has front-loaded his presentation with a huge volume of information. He's saying this book is about the divine healer, the Messiah, sent from God, spoken about in ancient Jewish writings and announced by prophets of the past (Isaiah) and later prophets (John the Baptizer).

This hidden richness in the text, despite its simple style, is why I'm telling you that Mark is SAYIN' MORE THAN HE IS SAYIN'.

Mark's style of writing has a quickened pace. He uses two Greek terms (*eutheōs* and *euthus*) which are translated as "immediately" or "as soon as". These terms appear nearly 50 times in his book. That's triple the number of times they are found in Matthew's Gospel - a much longer book. These words give the passages a sense of urgency. We heard them in the verses read today.

Verse 29: "**As soon as** they left the synagogue"
or
Verse 30: "They **immediately** told Jesus".

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But we also sense the pressure building in phrases like:

Verse 33: "The whole town gathered at their door."
or

Verse 37: "Everyone is looking for you."

We can't be sure why Mark wrote in this manner. Maybe that was just typical of Mark. Or, maybe he was expressing the urgency of the situation – the urgency of both the Jews living in Capernaum in Jesus' day (remember they were living under Roman occupation) and the Believers living in Rome decades later. Both groups were oppressed and both were persecuted.

Because Mark's gospel was probably intended to be read by the church in Rome, the tension his writing creates would feel right to them. They probably gathered together in the basement or back room of a home while someone read the book to them by candlelight – possibly in whispered tones – ever wary of Roman guards discovering their little group. But we have to be careful not to focus **ONLY** on the tension – it just surrounds the main point, to give emphasis.

In modern day writing we often state our thesis – the point of our message – right up front, usually in the first paragraph. In ancient Hebrew writings, the authors often sandwich their main point among multiple passages. They lead the reader up to the thesis and then walk them away from it. It appears that Mark has done just that.

Let's look at a verse placed right in the middle of the passage read today – verse 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."

Jesus did not feel the urgency his disciples expressed. He wasn't worried – there was no panic in his actions. Sandwiched between his preaching, healing, casting out demons, and then being chased down by the crowds and his disciples, he slips away to a quiet place and prays.

This is another case of where Mark is **SAYIN' MORE THAN HE IS SAYIN'**.

By conveying this story about Jesus in Capernaum, he's telling the Christians of Rome (and all of us) not to worry – the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior has arrived and is in close contact with God the Creator. All is in control.

There is no need to worry. That's the big picture of the Gospel of Mark!

So! Now that we have a better sense of Mark's focus, let's poke around in the details.

Last week, the passage that was read and Pastor Andy preached on described Jesus teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum and casting out impure spirits. Those who witnessed the event were amazed by the authority with which Jesus spoke. They marveled at how even the impure spirits obeyed him, and the word spread quickly about this new Rabbi – this new teacher.

Capernaum was a fishing village on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee. I can just imagine the scene

along the shore: Boats tied up while

fishermen gather and repair their nets, the market place busy with traders selling their catch, friends greeting one another and sharing the news of the day. But along with the price of bass there was a buzz about the carpenter's son who was heard preaching in the synagogue. The people were talking about the crazy guy who is always causing trouble in the synagogue, and how this new Rabbi healed him after a shutter and a shriek. That news – the Good News – was spreading, but not just in that little village; the news was sailing from port to port as the fisherman traveled back and forth on the Sea of Galilee.

Mark is **SAYIN' MORE THAN HE IS SAYIN'**

Let's dig a little deeper.

In the passage we read, we're told that it's the Sabbath – that's Saturday for the Jewish people. Jesus has just spent the morning teaching in the synagogue – after which he and his band of disciples decide to go to Simon and Andrew's home – probably for a special Sabbath meal.

Stop there, don't miss the details. Simon and Andrew – who are brothers – live together. I suspect that may have been common in those days – extended families living together, running the family fishing business together, eating meals together. I can picture the relatives and friends gathering – the women preparing the meal, the men watching the Super Bowl, or maybe they were telling fishing stories about the one that got away.

But something is wrong in Mark's account, one of the women isn't helping – she's not well, she has a fever, and



she happens to be Simon's mother-in-law. Wait a minute, isn't Simon also known as Peter? Peter the disciple of Jesus has a wife? Peter the person the Catholic Church considers the first Pope has a wife? Interesting detail!

Since Jesus has already demonstrated his ability to cast out impure spirits, and Simon realizes his mother-in-law is ill, he puts two and two together and "immediately" tells Jesus about the problem. In last week's lesson Jesus spoke to the impure spirit and it fled. What does Jesus do this time? He takes Simon's mother-in-law by the hand and helps her up. He touched a woman. He touched a sick woman. Rabbis didn't go around touching sick women – that could make them "unclean". This new Rabbi is changing everything these people are used to!

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What happens next? Jesus has healed Simon's mother-in-law, and she begins to help serve the Sabbath meal.

The fact that Simon's mother-in-law shifts from patient to servant might be interpreted as a sign of gratitude – she's so grateful she was healed that she dedicates herself to Jesus. It seems reasonable that we could draw that conclusion, but we could also say that she was simply restored to her normal everyday life. Mark may just be painting contrasting images. Those with demons are healed. Those who are just sick are healed - both are healed by Jesus.

There is no mention of demons causing this woman's fever. There are many Christians who think all illness is caused by demon possession or impure spirits. But we can't draw that conclusion from what Mark tells us. In his account some people are afflicted by evil spirits, but others are simply sick.

While we're on the subject of disease and demons, let's look at another subtle message in Mark's writings. Evil spirits can talk. They know things. They know who Jesus is. They understand and react to what is happening around them. Our modern day interpretation of evil spirits as simply being undiagnosed illnesses like manic depression or epilepsy fails to address this important point in Scripture.

Last week Pastor Andy referenced the movie *The Exorcist*. What makes that movie so scary is not the pea

soup vomit or Linda Blair's head spinning around. It's the demons, the impure spirits, that take over her body and confront those who dare to come near. She's not just sick, she's possessed.

I don't talk much about demons, or angels for that matter - mostly because people tend to get riled-up when you raise the topic. They either think you're a crazy extremist and want to get away from you as quickly as possible, or they can't wait to talk about the latest Dan Brown novel and all the wild stories he writes about. Broaching the subject of demons is a little like throwing wind-up chattering fake teeth onto the dinner table – some people will jump up and move away, while others can't wait to play with them.

However, there is no denying that Mark includes these little details about the impure spirits in the text. And he says just enough to get us thinking.

He is SAYIN' MORE THAN HE IS SAYIN'

Two last points and then I'll conclude.

In verse 32 we're told that the people waited until evening – after sunset – to bring the sick and demon-possessed to Jesus. Why?

He was in the synagogue earlier in the day. Can anyone think of a reason? What day is it in the passage? Yes! It was the Sabbath. The God ordained day of rest, when we are to stop working. The Jews in Capernaum were careful to follow the Commandment to rest on the seventh day. It was one of the things that set them apart from other nations. They didn't carry the sick and helpless across town on the Sabbath. But, in their tradition, the day ends at sunset.

We, as Christians, still practice the concept of Sabbath rest. Most of us set aside Sunday as our day of rest – a day dedicated to the Lord. We do so because Scripture says in Exodus 20 that the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy – God set it apart as special. The Jews in Capernaum respected the Sabbath.

In verse 38, Mark includes another interesting point. Jesus' disciples tell him that everyone is looking for him – which I think we can take as meaning the line of people hoping for healing has formed again. But Jesus says, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." There are

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several places in Scripture when Jesus stops short of healing everyone, and moves on. Apparently physical healing is not as high a priority with God, as it is with us. It seems Jesus is focused on a greater healing – an eternal healing.

When you first heard today's passage read, you may have thought I was just going to remind you about one of Jesus' many miracles – the healing of Simon's mother-in-law. After all, that's what the passage is about, right? But think about how much we would have missed if we had narrowly focused on that one point and didn't take the time to reflect on God's whole message to us. Good Bible study means lifting each phrase up to the light to expose the depth of meaning God has built into his word and observing how it fits together with other portions of Scripture.

The Bible is just as alive and powerful today as it was in the lives of all Believers throughout history. God has given us a rich and vibrant account that is packed with layer upon layer of meaning and insight.

Some of you have been looking over my shoulder at the beautiful stained glass behind me. It's a beautiful rendering of how Jesus may have appeared while on earth. But, hopefully, you have also noticed how the details work together to form an image that tells a bigger story – the nail holes in Jesus' hands and feet, the banner over Jesus's head, the number of fingers he is holding up, the palm branches beneath his feet. You can almost smell the lilies that surround Jesus? We could spend many Sundays just talking about the symbols in that stained glass.

In a similar way the words Mark chose to use help build a bigger image as well. The sense of urgency he expressed and the Roman church must have felt in the 1st century - is very similar to the frantic pace our culture is imposing on us today. It causes us to miss details – in art, in everyday life and in the Bible. We often collapse the Bible into two dimensions – we read left to right and top to bottom. But those words are part of a vast expanse of wisdom shared in Christian communities for centuries. Like the people in Capernaum we want our diseases to be healed. Like the early church in Rome we want the persecution to stop. But Mark's Gospel subtly shifts our attention off our hurried temporal concerns and redirects it onto Jesus.

Mark tells us in verse 39 that Jesus "...traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons." We, as a church and as individuals, are called to do the same – to preach the Good News, heal the sick, feed the hunger, to cloth the naked, yes, and even to cast out demons as we travel along life's path.

A cursory reading of this passage might have missed the details we observed today. But if we take the time to carefully read God's word and share it with others, we will begin to notice that God is often SAYIN' MORE THAN HE IS SAYIN'.

Let's pray...