

SEPTEMBER 28, 2025

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

BIBLE STUDY Mark Chapter 3

At the beginning of chapter 3 we see Jesus' authority over the Sabbath extended. This encounter is less about the healing and more about the confrontation. We know He can heal. Here the conflict jumps up another level. An afflicted man is present on the Sabbath. Jesus asks him to stand up and make a centerpiece of himself. He knows that there are people waiting to judge Him. He knows that this is a trap of sorts. Jesus makes a demonstration of both power and wisdom.

Contrary to what is often thought, it was likely understood by most Jews at the time that life saving measures and matters of necessity were permitted on the Sabbath. To heal would likely fall into this category. Nevertheless there were leaders present looking to find an excuse to accuse Jesus.

Jesus asks a pointed question. I'll state it a little differently. "Is it okay to do the loving thing on the Sabbath?" No one there wanted to answer. The ones against Jesus wanted to accuse Him. Perhaps the rest were waiting to see what would happen and didn't want to risk angering the authorities present. Regardless silence reigned.

This unwillingness to answer what should have been the simplest of questions angered Jesus.

Next He does something. He makes a request. That's all. Just words. He doesn't act. He doesn't do anything we might think would look like medical practice. He just tells the guy to extend his hand. And that hand is healed.

In truth Jesus hasn't done anything to violate the Sabbath. All He did was speak. This isn't a violation. Which might explain why no formal accusation was made. Still, it angered the powers at hand.

Not only did it anger the religious authorities. It also angered the Herodians. The Herodians were wealthy and politically influential. In other words, they represented a Roman interest. Now Jesus has both Jewish religious authority and Romans of some influence gunning for Him.

Keep in mind when we read the book of Acts we get a flavor of things. When there were outbursts related to Jewish religious issues and the Jewish folks appealed to Roman authority, most often the first reaction from Rome wasn't to step in. They were more annoyed. "This is your mess. You have your own way of handling your religious arguments. Deal with it yourself." Only when a disturbance threatened the peace in earnest did they step in. Here somehow both religious and political power aligned against Jesus.

Mark is ratcheting up the tension in the story for us early,

Next we see another indication of the crowds that followed because of the miracles. Jesus sets out on a boat to avoid being mobbed. This brings a couple things to the front of mind and faith.

First, we see that Jesus didn't heal everyone who came His way. He couldn't. Lingered too long in a rowdy crowd was a surefire way to get Himself prematurely killed. That He didn't heal everyone is perfectly fine. It reminds us that Jesus looked at His mission from a big picture perspective. In order to complete His ministry He had to say "no" to some things to ensure that He stayed alive long enough to complete His task. In Mark 1 He identifies that task as preaching the Kingdom of God. As the story unfolds we also see that His task was securing our redemption. These two things were of utmost importance.

This also answers the question of why so many big and flashy miracles don't seem to happen anymore today. John calls them "signs", meaning they were markers of His identity. Why? So people would pay attention to His message. Jesus didn't come to work miracles, by His own admission. He came to help people transform their hearts and lives to be in keeping with God's desires.

The apostles had a similar gift. They did miracles identifying themselves as the legitimate representatives of Jesus. Their role however was to establish the church. The point of the church was bringing people to faith and letting the message take hold. That message of love, grace and mercy is the message. It is the compelling factor to bring people to faith.

NOT miracles.

2,000 years later the church has had plenty of time to establish itself as welcoming, loving, compassionate, and doing so through serving unconditionally our communities. That is the miracle that is to compel others to faith. Mistaking miracles as the, or even a, major component of ministry makes the same mistake as was made 2,000 years ago. People came for the miracle and left before they accepted the message. We lead with the message. The first miracle is the miracle of the heart. Does God still heal? Of course! That doesn't mean that miracles are promised or guaranteed. Salvation and transformation are promised when we accept the message.

Then we get the names of the disciples. Jesus forms His inner circle. Rather than pot shot individual call stories at this point Mark wants us to see that in the midst of these gathering crowds there are those who set themselves apart. Jesus invites them to minister alongside Him. Of course they do!

Why 12? For most it is a matter of symbolism. 12 tribes of Israel. 12 disciples of Jesus. 12 tribes establishing the old covenant. 12 disciples establishing the new. The number was important enough that when Judas hangs himself after betraying Jesus (note the foreshadowing in this passage of chapter 3), they are one short of 12. At the beginning of Acts they select Matthias to step in to complete that number of 12.

Then we get a familiar story. Mark breaks one story in two. Jesus comes to town and is overwhelmed with a crowd. His family enters the scene and declares Him crazy. Then the scene with the religious teachers, then back to the family.

Keep in mind that while it seems like two separate incidents, it's actually one. The family coming to Him is at the same time these religious teachers are also gathering. The scene would have been chaos. Some wanting and needing Him. Others, the ones with power, wanting to demonize and kill Him. What had happened to their Jesus?!

A common sense of this, and likely the most probable, is that the family sees all of this and wonders why Jesus/how Jesus would/could conjure up this reaction. What has He done? He must be nuts to stir this up!

In our discussion another notion was suggested. Could the family have been being protective? They fear Jesus' safety. They don't know what's going on. What's an easy way to extract Him and wave off whatever He's said that's stirring up the trouble? "He's gone crazy! Let us take Him home and talk some sense into Him!" Get Him out of there before something terrible befalls Him.

Regardless there is trouble brewing with accusations. They accuse Jesus of being in league with the devil by casting out spirits.

Jesus' response has been repeated through the ages. It is idiotic to think that He could be in cahoots with the devil. If any cause, group, individual, or so forth works against itself it has no chance of victory or sustaining. It will do itself in. There is a message here that America would do well to heed. Being unable to make peace with ourselves is a sentence of destruction.

Then He gives the illustration of binding the strong man before taking from his home. This illustration is used to make a point. If the devil has taken up occupancy in a person, before reclaiming that person someone stronger and superior has to deal with the devil. Someone has to take control and throw the devil out so that the person can be reclaimed. Who has that power? Who has that authority? Jesus!

Then comes the unforgiveable sin. Keep in mind that Jesus is addressing a particular crowd in a particular incident. There is no sense that this was to be some confusing, terrifying blanket statement to cause panic and worry for the next 2,000 years. In fact verse 30 tells us that this comment was directed specifically because these teachers were saying that what was done through the power of God was done through the power of the devil. Jesus was issuing a warning and potential consequence to those in His midst that would misattribute His holy and Godly work to the devil. They would be misleading everyone to think right is wrong and wrong is right. This is a grave sin not easily overcome.

Keep in mind that if you've ever wondered if you've committed this unforgivable sin you likely haven't. If you had you wouldn't be worried about pleasing God to begin with.

Then we're back to the family. "Who is my family? Those who do the will of God." This isn't a disrespect to His family gathered and looking for Him. It is a statement of expanding kinship. Our family isn't biology, it's everyone who is striving, genuinely striving, to please God. That's why we hear Christians refer to each other as "brother" and "sister". We are family.

We don't know what happened right after. Jesus might have, after making this statement, ran outside to hug his family. That isn't Mark's point. Mark's point is clarifying that we are ONE in God and ultimately one in Christ. It's no accident this is right after the story about "a kingdom divided." While Jesus makes the point that infighting is a destruction, he then makes a point of unity. Under God we are NOT divided. We are to be connected, unified, and love one another as kin, as family. In this there is strength. Godly, good strength that can survive the tests of this world.

We need more of this today. Break from the division and find the unity. Find the common purpose of God and Christ and let the Spirit bind us together for the greater good of all.