

Seventh Mark of a Healthy Church: Reflection on the Bible Passages

Mark 1: 14-15; 21-39

Jesus is very clear about his ministry.

Jesus' disciples are very clear about his ministry.

Jesus is compassionate but not side-tracked; he moves on to the neighbouring towns and does not hang around in Capernaum.

Mark's Gospel has a sense of movement. Jesus' mission has urgency. He goes from one place to another... ' They went to; As soon as; That evening; In the morning; Let us go on; And he went throughout...'

We get a sense of perpetual dynamism – the Spirit propels Jesus into proclaiming the Good News. This is the news that God is love; that God wants his people to know him; that there is no-one beyond the scope of God's love. All that is needed it to turn towards God, away from previous choices and ways of being, and believe.

Jesus heals many people and in this, he demonstrates God's love for them. But the healing comes with the proclamation; the word with the deed.

Moreover, Jesus is clearly recognised as one with authority – not like others. Jesus has the authority and power of God. No wonder the people were amazed.

Jesus' authority comes from the Father. To be fuelled for his ministry he prayed. Not two minute prayers asking for some interventions along the way, but sustained, soaking prayer in communion with the Father.

If we want authority to minister in Jesus' name, authority we have been given (Matt. 28:18), the way to claim it is in prayer.

What do we learn from these few verses?

- That there will be many distractions and demands made on our time. Therefore, we need to be clear about the scope and focus of the ministry in this place.

- That communicating the love of God – the Good News of God – to people around us should be done in word and deed. We need to say why we do what we do.
- That amazing things are possible; that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask, imagine or understand.
- That prayer is the root and ground of all we do in and for Christ. Prayer is the driving force. Our relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, fostered and nurtured in prayer, is the source, the inspiration and sustaining power for all we do in Christ. No prayer, no ministry.

Matthew 11: 25-30

‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ (Matt. 11: 29-30)

I don’t think Jesus is suggesting that ministry in any capacity will be a breezy walk through the park. Followers of Jesus are not promised ease, peace and security; far from it.

But, if we can discern the will of God through the Spirit, opportunities emerge and things start to shift and grow in unexpected ways. Shut doors open; open doors close. Strongholds fall and new shoots rise up.

Also, when we know we are not alone, but that we work in and with Christ, we do not have to carry the crippling responsibility for every outcome. Whatever happens, if we have prayed and sought God in our decisions and actions, we have the peace of knowing that we have acted in honesty and trust.

From time to time, we ourselves and the churches we represent all fall into the ‘I only’ mentality. *We are the captains of our souls, everything depends on us, the survival of the church, or even salvation itself.* This sense of personal responsibility is heinous and can lead to nervous breakdowns, self-harm and personality disorders. In

everything we do, we act with and in Christ. We should offer everything to him: 'Not in our own strength, but in yours, Lord'.

'Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.'

Let go and let God is not a slogan for the idle and fatalistic, but a safeguarding reminder to '*seek first the Kingdom of God*', and everything else will be added as a bonus.

We cannot do everything, but we can set aside time for prayerful discernment and decide, on that prayerful basis, priorities for the future of ministry in this place.

Let's pray:

Lord of our pilgrimage,
we give thanks for all whose compassion and energy
helped to birth Christianity in this land.
Inflame us with the same spirit of discipline and love,
that in our own generation your Church may be enlivened
to sing your praises in words and acts of loving service.
We make this prayer in the name of the Communion of perfect love,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.