

Last weekend, a team of 16 people from Summit travelled to Omaha's inner city to experience Urban Plunge, a practical ministry to the poor, organized by our own Michael Ross of Christ for the City International, helping Christians see how God can use them to make a difference.

Testimony: Urban Plunge ministry weekend – Kristy Smith (8:30), Tommy/Wanda Tomforde (11 AM)

We thank the Lord for each of you who participated. We know that in large or small ways, your eyes were opened and your hearts expanded to see the needs and to care about the people who are often overlooked by the world, but who matter so much to God.

What a great opportunity to serve and give like Jesus! Way to go! *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).*

Welcome to week #2 of our series in the Gospel of Mark. Today we are looking at four episodes in the early days of Jesus' ministry, recorded in **Mark 1:29 - 2:12**, where we see that Jesus, as the Servant of the Lord, was continually moved by compassion. If you want to serve and give like Him, then you need to begin by looking at your heart. Do you really care about people? Jesus' compassion is seen –

1st, by His **TURNING THE SICK INTO SERVANTS**. Look at **Mark 1:29-34** - *And immediately (Jesus) left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. 31 And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. 32 That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door. 34 And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.*

A compassionate person is usually going to stay pretty busy because there is never a shortage of people who are in some kind of need. The compassion that Jesus demonstrated to Peter's mother-in-law is soon extended to the crowds. The Jews were forbidden to work or travel on the Sabbath, which ended at sunset on Saturday. So as the sun began to set, all who had needs emerged from their homes to find Jesus.

Undoubtedly, most of these people cared very little about the spiritual implications of Jesus' ministry. They just knew He had power to help them with their felt needs. But still, we see the heart of Jesus here. He cared about the physical plight of people, regardless of their motivations.

Jesus' compassion is first seen as he visits the home of Simon Peter. After listening to Jesus preach in the synagogue, Simon probably said to his fishing buddies, “Hey, let's go eat with the preacher at my house. My wife's mother lives with us, and trust me, she always prepares enough food to feed an army!”

But instead of a delicious Sabbath feast, they arrive only to find a sick cook! So what do they do? **v 30** says, *they told (Jesus) about her*. I'd say that's a pretty good first response, wouldn't you? This is an example we should all follow. Christians are not going to be immune from sickness or sorrow.

So let's know what to do first when troubles come our way or when we encounter a need: Immediately let's tell Jesus about it! Sure, use whatever human means are available to you. If you're sick, call a doctor. If you're being sued, call a lawyer. If you need a favor, call a friend. But the *first* thing you should do is cry out to the Lord. Because no one is more compassionate and ready to help than He is!

Psalm 55:22 says, *Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you.* And it was Simon Peter who advises us to deal with the difficulties of life by *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:7)*. You have some cares? Then tell someone who cares! If a friend seems overwhelmed by their own cares, you may not want to bother them. But Jesus is a friend whose care is... you!

Notice in **v 31**, how Jesus takes this woman by the hand and lifts her up. Certainly He could have healed her from the next room. But Jesus comes close to her, gently conveying personal warmth that must have touched her soul as well as her body. And in response to her healing, what does she do?

The text says, *she began to serve them (v 31b)*. That's the telltale sign of everyone who has truly received the healing touch of Jesus Christ! Once He rescues us from our sins and our sorrows, what can we do except serve Him the rest of our lives? We are healed that we might be His glad servants. So the fact that a woman is *serving* these men should not be taken as a sign of subservience or inferiority –

Because Mark uses the same word in **v 13** when he says, the angels were *ministering* to Jesus after his temptation. Same word! They were serving Him. Do you want to be like an angel? Then serve. You'll be in some pretty good company. In fact, the very same word is found in our key verse –

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve” (10:45). So the angels serve, and Jesus serves. And those who have been touched by His grace do what? They serve also! Serving is the way of Jesus and those who follow Him. He restores our lives so that we might be useful to Him. It's a demonstration of His love that He turns the sick into servants.

2nd, Jesus shows us an important lesson about compassion in **v 35-39** as we find Him **TUNING HIS HEART TO THE FATHER'S**. *And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, 37 and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." 38 And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." 39 And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

What I find especially interesting about this episode is how Jesus' prayer life seems to have enabled Him to sense the guidance of the Father in a way that the disciples had not yet come to learn.

In **v 36** when we read that the disciples *sought for him*, the Greek word that Mark uses here literally means “to pursue.” It can even mean “to hunt.” It didn't matter to them if they were intruding on Jesus' communion with the Father. They were going to hunt him down – this was urgent!

“Everyone is looking for you,” they report (**v 37**). Sounds like a good thing to us. We all like to be needed, don't we? Popularity? We'll take it! But whenever Mark talks about those who are *looking* for Jesus, that particular verb always conveys negative, not positive, connotations.

Later in the gospel, the word will actually become synonymous with trying to *kill* Jesus: people were *looking* for Him! So this is not necessarily a virtuous thing. The disciples didn't see it, but Jesus knew: the crowds wanted to control Him, not follow Him. And Jesus will not be controlled. He will not be deflected from His purpose.

So He says very simply, “Let's go, boys. I think it's time to move on. I have a mission that involves other places as well.” At the height of His public appeal, Jesus leaves town! How did He come to make *that* decision? He sought out a place of stillness in the midst of a whirlwind of activity, so He could hear from heaven: “What do *You* want me to do, Father? I have come to do *Your* will!”

You see, even for Jesus, *every* need He encountered did not constitute the will of God for His life. His compassion was harnessed and directed by His understanding of a personal sense of mission and purpose.

Have you heard from the Lord lately concerning what *He* would have you do, where *He* would have to go? If the sinless Son of God was dependent on the Father's guidance through prayer, how much more do I need to seek the Lord if I am going to know and do His will? Surely Jesus had greater demands on His time than I have on mine. And yet Jesus made prayer such a priority –

That He rose *very early in the morning, while it was still dark*, and He went out *to a desolate place* for prayer (v 35). When is *your* time? Where is *your* place to get in touch with God? If Jesus needed to do this, we need to do it! Even Jesus could not extend Himself *outward* in compassion without first attending to His *inner* life – re-calibrating His heart so that it was beating in sync with the Father's purpose.

If I sense my compassion is draining away, time with the Father re-fuels me to minister again. But also, listening to God is important so that I am not just going about passionately promoting my own agendas, but deriving a ministry from my relationship with Him.

Notice also that Jesus doesn't say, "Let's move on so I can do more miracles in other places, but *“that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”* Jesus cared about needs and He healed people. But every physical healing is temporary at best. What we really need is to be made right with God so we may escape His wrath. And for that to be communicated, words are needed.

So Jesus sees *preaching* as His primary ministry. And personally, I find this to be quite humbling. What an infinite honor Jesus put on the job of the preacher. For three years, the King of kings and Lord of lords went about proclaiming the Gospel. And still today, while we must do good works, let's not forget that it is through the faithful preaching of God's Word that sinners are saved and saints are sanctified.

3rd, Jesus shows true compassion by **TRADING PLACES WITH AN OUTCAST**. We see it in **Mark 1:40-45** - *And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." 41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." 42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them." 45 But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.*

First of all, we need to understand that when a leper approached Jesus, this was a shocking situation – totally offensive in that culture. Skin diseases like this were widespread in that time. Leprosy was not only believed to be highly contagious, but also a sign of God's judgment. So it not only robbed people of their health, but also their dignity, their occupation, their family, and their friends.

According to Old Testament law, a leprous person had to live alone, as an outcast, outside the city gates, and if it was necessary for him to come within 50 feet of other people, he had to cover his face and cry out, "Unclean, unclean!" (**Lev 13:45-46**) Think how you would feel shouting this while entering a store or a school. Imagine the constant sense of worthlessness and despair. Other diseases had to be cured, but leprosy had to be *cleansed*. And this man risks everything in the hopes of being cleansed by Jesus.

v 40 declares his statement of faith: *“If you will, you can make me clean.”* Although he knew Christ *could* heal him, he did not know whether Christ *would* heal him. Most Jews would have turned away

from this man in disgust and self-protection. But with Jesus, compassion replaces contempt. Rather than turning from the leper, Jesus turns to him.

And in **v 41**, *Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."* This was extreme compassion! Touching someone with a fever is one thing, but Jesus brings Himself into full contact with the most dreaded disease of His day. Realize that if this guy was a husband and father, even his wife and kids wouldn't have dared to touch him! Again, Jesus could have healed from a distance, but I think Jesus wanted to minister to both the physical and emotional needs of this man.

And try to imagine the change that took place! (**v 42**) When the leprous man woke up that morning, his whole body was a mass of sores and his very existence was a burden. But when he went to bed that night, he was free of pain and fit for society. Imagine his joy and hope. He was alive again! But then –

Jesus sends him packing with a no-nonsense charge to keep quiet about this! (**v 43-44**) ... huh?!?? At this point in His ministry, Jesus is intent on guarding His Messianic identity to preserve it from misunderstanding and false expectations of those who wanted to make him a political deliverer for example. But what do you think were the chances of this guy keeping quiet?

v 45 tells us that he broke Jesus' command: *he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places.*

And so having been relieved of his burden, the leper in effect, imposes a burden on Jesus. This incident began with Jesus on the inside and the leper on the outside. But now, they have traded places. The leper is back into society, and Jesus is outside in desolate places. You can see the parallel, can't you?

In the Bible, leprosy is a picture of sin. It defiles our being and separates us from fellowship with God and each other. We are the outcasts, in desperate need of cleansing, and our only hope is to trade places with Jesus! He is the Servant of the Lord prophesied by **Isaiah** who *shall bear their iniquities...* and be *numbered with the transgressors (53:11-12)*. To cleanse us from sin, God sent His only Son.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21) Christ traded places with us! How's that for compassion!?! At the cross, He took our sin, we take His righteousness.

And finally, we see the marvelous compassion of Jesus, as He is, **4th, TARGETING THE REAL NEEDS OF THE NEEDY** in **Mark 2:1-12** - *And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. 3 And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. 4 And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. 5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— 11 "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." 12 And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"*

I think this story is filled with one surprise after another. First, the paralytic surprises everyone by interrupting Jesus' sermon with a dramatic descent from the roof with the help of his four friends.

By the way, you have to admire those guys, don't you? I mean, these are true friends! They don't give up easily. Their buddy needs to meet Jesus, and they're going to see that it happens. If an opening to Jesus cannot be found, then one must be made, even if it costs somebody their roof!

The roof of a Palestinian home was typically flat, accessible by outside stone staircases, and supported by beams resting on the exterior walls of the house. The beams were cross-hatched by smaller poles and sticks, which were covered with thatch, which in turn was covered with mud. The whole thing may have been two feet in depth, and that's why these guys had to dig through the roof.

They couldn't use the door, because a crowd of people were jamming the doorway of the house where Jesus was speaking. Now crowds play an important role in Mark's gospel, but it's generally not a good thing to be part of the crowd. The single most common attribute of crowds in Mark is that they obstruct access to Jesus. So even though crowds show popularity, they are not a measure of success.

Crowds tend to be passive and even fickle. Enthusiasm for Jesus, or even closeness to Him, is not the same as faith in Him. It's not the same as being His disciple. The crowd stands and observes; disciples commit themselves to action... as demonstrated by these four friends. So Jesus is not offended by the roof removers. He is encouraged by their efforts!

v 5 says that *Jesus saw their faith*, and this leads to the second surprise. This time it's the paralytic himself who is surprised when Jesus says to him, "*My son, your sins are forgiven.*" What? Wait a minute! The paralytic was not brought to Jesus to have his sins forgiven! He wanted his paralysis healed!

So now we have a rather unexpected twist in the story. Jesus targeted the real need of this needy person. The paralytic *thought* he needed to have his body healed. Jesus knew that his *greater* need was to have his sins forgiven. And this is an important lesson for us to learn also.

We're delighted to provide shelter and food and clothing to improve the earthly lives of (currently) 230 orphans in India. But most of all, we want to see them in heaven. We're concerned about their spiritual welfare. And that's why we're excited to announce that your \$20 per month sponsorships will soon include provision of a Christian education for that child.

The Christian house parents have been doing a great job discipling these kids before and after school. But now, because of your generous gifts to purchase a field for them to grow their own rice, this will reduce the orphanage food budget. Joab has said we could reduce our sponsorship to \$15/month when the first harvest comes. But we have decided that it would be better for us to continue sending \$20/month and allow them to use the extra money to hire 10 teachers to begin a Christian school right there at the orphanage complex! This means that our children will no longer have to attend a Hindu school and be forced to participate in the worship of idols. Hallelujah! We are very excited about this, and so is Joab.

Also, you'll be hearing more and more about plans for the new Lord's Closet ministry here in Alta. We've rented a storefront on Main Street We really appreciate those worked yesterday to help prepare the building, and others who will be working today. Lord willing, by November 1, we will be providing clothing and household items for those in need.

And I'm glad that our leadership team for this ministry, under the direction of Lorie Stanton and Joyce Rydstrom, are being very intentional to target the real needs of needy people. Because we don't want to

simply put a shirt on someone's back, and see him go to hell well-dressed. Ultimately, we want to lead him to salvation in Jesus Christ! We want them to experience the forgiveness of sins through faith in the One who died for them and rose again.

Well back to our text, it turns out that Jesus' announcement of sins forgiven creates a little bit of a controversy (v 6). What began as a heart-warming healing account becomes a heated confrontation with the scribes on the question of religious authority.

At the end of v 7 they're thinking, "OK, time-out now. *Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" – and the premise of their protest is a good one. The forgiveness of sins *is* the exclusive right of God. But since it never dawns on them that Jesus is God, they draw a false conclusion: they accuse Jesus of blasphemy.

And now it's *their* turn to be surprised! (v 8-9) Jesus knew what they were thinking: from a human perspective, it's easy, it's safe to pronounce the forgiveness of sin, because that statement can't be proven disproven. If you come to me with a broken leg and ask me to heal you, and I say, "your sins are forgiven," that's easy for me to say. There's no way for you to verify my statement. Jesus knows that, and He knows that's what they were thinking.

So He decides to provide evidence of His authority to forgive sins by healing the paralytic, something which could be verified by all. The authority to heal and the authority to forgive are the same authority.

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." (v 11)

The man picks up his bed and walks out of there, while the people watch in utter amazement, absolutely stunned. "*We never saw anything like this!*" (v 12) Isn't the Lord good?! The man came for a blessing, and he left with a double blessing:

The psalmist wrote, *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases. (Psalm 103:2-3)*

Did you know that **Joab Lohara** was converted to Christ through those verses? When he was 18 years old, wasting away from a serious disease, Joab read this verse on a gospel tract. And he said, "Lord, I need to have my disease healed, *and* I need to have my sins forgiven. If You are willing, Lord, You can! Will You do this for me?" The Lord heard his cry and poured out the double blessing on Joab as well.

The Bible says in **Isaiah 55:6-7**, *Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

If you hear His voice, come to Him now as we stand and sing together our response to God's Word.