

**BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATION**  
**Mark 1:29-39**  
**February 5, 2012**

In homiletics classes at seminary, the tongue in cheek thought was every sermon had to have 3 points and a poem. I don't know if it was thought an average congregant couldn't remember more than that . . . or the preacher couldn't. Let me adhere to the formula in our brief time.

If you go to the movies today and you haven't been in a long time, there are several things you may (or may not) expect. First, expect to pay \$10.00 for a ticket and the same for a soda and popcorn. For a family of 4 you could drop \$80.00 for a night out at the movies.

If you're running a little late, don't stress. There are always previews of coming attractions (along with clever appeals to turn off cell phones and minimize talking so others can enjoy the film) which last a good ten minutes or more before the featured film.

Contrary to this experience is the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark. No previews or

prologue, no genealogies (the equivalent of scrolling credits), no charming birth accounts. You open (the curtains part) the book and Boom! you're rolling along into the story. Jesus is baptized (and God's affirming voice splits the heavens (vs. 10); he deals with Satan's temptations in the desert (vs. 13); announces the impending reign of God (vs. 15); chooses his first disciples (vs. 17) and shows his power over demons (vs. 25) . . . all in the first 28 verses of the first chapter. And there's not one commercial.

I wonder if it's less a "shock and awe" blitzkrieg than Mark makes it sound. It's like he's racing you through a day in the life of Jesus as a campaign manager might race a candidate through a day of political appearances. Perhaps its young Mark is excited or has a fast approaching deadline to meet . . . or his description using the word "immediately" multiple times is a reflection of himself more than it is Jesus' style. In the Gospels taken as a whole, one does not get the impression Jesus was breathlessly running from one appointment to the next. He was deliberate, unhurried, and would in one case stop the parade because he

sensed a desperate woman's touch or receive children. Even in Mark's fast-paced prose, he recalls Jesus went apart on a mountain to pray. Perhaps it's important to remember we all see Jesus through our particular lenses or point of view, but no one lens or point of view captures the totality of this incredible figure Jesus. Of this we can be sure; Jesus didn't mirror the frantic pace we are so familiar with. Lots of speed, little depth.

As an aside "G. K. Chesterton once bemused that Jesus went off by himself in order to laugh. In other words, he heard so much misapprehension, such dense statements, so little clear and faithful response, that he had to go off alone and laugh just to keep his sanity."

What should be noted as well is this divine/human with absolute clarity about who He was and what he came to do . . . and never swerved from it, could in 3 short years accomplish His mission and change the world forever . . . and in a paced manner without running past people.

There are lots of very bad jokes about Mothers-in-law. I googled Mother-in-law jokes and the array of tasteless, cynical jabs was just too much to repeat. In Mark's account, Jesus and company leave the synagogue and go to Simon and Andrew's house where Simon's mom-in-law was sick with a fever. They appeal to Jesus on her behalf, and Jesus went to her, took her by the hand and the fever left. You and I, having the advantage of knowing about this Jesus, may simply nod. That's what Jesus did. But let it be noted this was all a totally new experience for everyone in the story. Something extraordinary is happening. This man has authority over demons and illness . . . no wonder the whole city gathered at the door.

What may slip past us is she, the mother-in-law, gets up and begins to serve, to wait on them. Most would consider that a routine, even menial task. Only it's not menial. She's part of the in-breaking kingdom of God at her modest table. Some have called her the first deacon, the first to model discipleship, servant hood. Simon and the boys hadn't gotten it yet . . . and

wouldn't for awhile. They jockey for positions of authority. They don't offer to wash feet. It's beneath them, they think. What are they saying? By rising and serving, Simons, mom-in-law, is doing something radical – violating the Sabbath. Jesus doesn't command her to do it. She understands something greater is at hand; something not subject to being legislated out by precise, picky propriety. Servant hood.

Miracles. This whole story is bookended and shot through with miracles – exorcism and healing specifically. And many more would follow. Right? But there's an important observation we should note. None of the Gospels ever calls any of Jesus' healings a miracle. Miracle is our word for inexplicable phenomena. The crowds who witnessed the healings were astonished, but not Jesus. It was as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Not so much supernatural, but the way the world was meant to be, the way the kingdom of God as seen in Jesus is. We're getting a glimpse of that reality in Jesus healing Simon's mom-in-law. Jesus was accused of turning the world upside down; maybe he was turning the world right side up.

John's Gospel calls the wonders Jesus did 'signs.' That's a good way to think of them. Signs are important, but they point to, represent something else. For many the signs are mistaken by folks. Many flocked to Jesus to see the signs only without realizing they were significant of something greater present. They were glimpses of who God is and what God wants. Jesus occasionally had strong words for those who demanded proof, i.e. signs, miracles. He wasn't seeking a bunch of miracle bedazzled gawkers; he sought committed disciples.

That's not to say we dismiss miracles, signs. Ironic that they were intended to point folks to a deeper reality, but today they are often thought of as barriers to believing in Christ. Signs are best seen as a gracious overflowing of Gods divine compassion, release, restoration, redemption – the way the world is supposed to be. This is not a set, flat, confined, settled world. God breaks in, the veil is pulled back and we see. Something's afoot and we are involved, particularly as servants. Amen.



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