

## HOMILY FOR WEDNESDAY, JULY 16, 2025 / MARK 2: 13 – 22

There are two key messages in the passage from Mark. The first is radical inclusion and the second is closely related: Jesus' message transcends all manner of formerly applied rules – boundaries will be broken more often than not to serve radical inclusion.

Let us start, however, with the Gospel of Mark. We have had Gospel readings from John and Luke for some months. Today is our first reading from Mark in some time. Some key points about the Gospel of Mark before we look at our passage: It is the oldest of the four Gospels written in the mid 60's of the common era. We know that it could not have been written before late 64 because it was written in Rome after the community of Christos follows among the Jews of Rome was massacred having been framed as the perpetrators of a great fire on July 19, 64 which destroyed much of central Rome. This is the fire through which Nero is reputed to have fiddled while Rome burned. In fact, most historians believe that Nero ordered the fire to clear the way for his plans for monumental architecture. But scapegoats needed to be found. The Jews of Rome were immediately identified. At that time, the Jewish ghetto was on the other side of the Tiber. The fire did not jump the river, so the ghetto was spared which made the Jews the obvious choice. Lest the entire Jewish community be eliminated, some informed the Roman authorities that it was the followers of the Christ that were responsible. The most notable figures eliminated in the massacre of the Jewish followers of Christ were both Peter and Paul.

Mark's Gospel is known as the Gospel that provides guidance when moving through great suffering. It is also a Gospel in which Jesus has repeated altercations with the Pharisees. Perhaps signifying a break with the Jewish authorities after the Christos followers became the scapegoats for the scapegoats. Mark certainly consistently contrasts Jesus' message from that of the Pharisees to their disadvantage. While contrasting Jesus message with that of the Jewish religious authorities occurs in the other three gospels, do not forget that Mark's is the first and that it occurs shortly after the massacre of the Christos Community in Rome.

If we had been meeting yesterday, we would have read the first incident of tension between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus heals a paralytic after which some scribes of the Pharisees respond to Jesus forgiving the man's sins and restoring him to full movement with *Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?*

Our passage highlights another major problem for the Pharisees with Jesus. He eats with outcasts and sinners. For 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews Tax Collectors by definition were outcasts and sinners. They collected taxes for the Roman authorities, but they had great latitude in how much they demanded. Rome only cared that it got the amount it named. The tax collectors could and did set higher rates and pocketed the difference. For the Jews, eating in particular with outcasts was unthinkable. As if his dinner companions were not bad enough, Jesus

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called one of them, Levi, to become one of his disciples. This is one example of radical inclusion that characterizes all Jesus' earthly ministry and continues to be expressed in trepidation after the resurrection by the Apostles as we read about in the Book of Acts. Jesus says, *Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.* Last week, you may recall that the Aramaic name Cephas became Petros in Greek and Peter in English. Well Levi is Aramaic and became Matthew in Greek. It is the same in English. This is the Matthew who either wrote or had the Gospel of Matthew attributed to him – radical inclusion, indeed.

Jesus is once again in trouble with the Pharisees when all are fasting save for his disciples. Jesus makes it clear that there is no fasting while he is still there. He goes on to indicate that new wine does not go into old skins and no piece of unshrunk cloth can be used to mend an old garment. In other words old doctrines, rules, restrictions will not serve moving forward into the Kingdom of God. Those old ways must not be a barrier to the new.

So what does this mean to us. Well just look at us. Fifty years ago most of us would not have been seen dead in church dressed the way we are. Women without hats, men without ties, shorts, jeans, women in trousers – are there no standards left? Thunderbolts must be on the way! Think of all the rules we used to have about which we don't give a fig now. You could say of us that we are recovering Pharisees. We care most that the lost, the suffering, the confused find a home with meaning and connection to God and that those who have such a connection find it nurtured and strengthened in community.

Let me give you a very clear and important example of what we have put aside in the interest of radical inclusion and barrier free access to God. When I became an Anglican some 50 odd years ago, I couldn't take communion until I was formally received into the church and confirmed by the Bishop. Now at every eucharist we hear, All Are Welcome at God's Table. Could we possibly have a better manner of evangelizing those who are struggling towards faith than the Eucharist? The first time newcomers about whose background we know little or nothing bestir themselves to rise to their feet and walk forward to receive, we witness a conversion moment. It is not so very long ago that such persons would have been asked, before they got too far down the aisle, are you baptized? are you an Anglican? in the best Pharisaic tradition. Thankfully that is no longer true in this diocese, but do not imagine it is not still the case in many places in the church including within the Anglican Church of Canada. Do not imagine that I am saying baptism is unimportant, but perhaps it needn't come first. Our Lord said: *Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.* May we remain well enough to continually break down barriers so all may know the mercy of our God and may the great physician cure us when we falter. Amen