

***Christ To The World -
Saviour***

Mark 8:22-9:1

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As Jesus is to the Church, so the Church is to be to the world.

This one sentence summarizes everything that we as a church are about.

It is the core of our existence.

Miss this - and we miss the whole deal.

Nail it - and nothing else matters.

As Jesus is to the Church, so the Church is to be to the world.

We're trying to keep this sentence in our mind as we work our way through a summer study in the Gospel of Mark.

Let's summarize where we've been so far.

We began four weeks ago witnessing the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1. After the warmth and affirmation of that event we saw him **immediately** driven into the wilderness.

Because the life and ministry of Jesus was not about celebration and warm fuzzies and good times. He came to earth to engage life with all its struggles and pains and inadequacies and evils and wrong --- all the stuff that wilderness has come to symbolize in Scripture. He came to engage them, not to run away from them.

And that is our call, too.

In the second week we watched Jesus teach with authority, and take authority over a demon. We learned that authority is found, and our confidence as a Church to get out there and serve, comes through our surrender to Jesus Christ.

Last time we travelled to Mark 3. And we watched Jesus broaden the boundaries of family. That was a tough sell to a Jewish audience that placed high value on the biological family unit. And it remains a tough sell today where sometimes we overestimate, perhaps even idolize the biological family unit.

As we go into the world, we remember that there is a spiritual tie that is closer than any blood tie. It's a tie that binds us to people we might never otherwise imagine ourselves being connected to. And we reach out to them. We call them "brother" and "sister." We value them. We make space for them in our lives.

And it is together with them that we head into the world to serve as the Body of Christ;

being to the world what Jesus is to the Church.

That's where we've been.

This week --

Mark 8:22 -9:1, p.43 (New Testament)

So - what might this passage mean to our lives, given that phrase -

*As Jesus is to the Church,
so the Church is to be to the world.*

To begin, we see Jesus healing.

He enters the situation of a person who suffers, and sets the wrong right.

It seems, for some reason, to have been a particularly difficult case.

But he sees it through.

He is there to bring restoration -- in simple, quick situations AND in the difficult ones that take time.

Jesus doesn't just wave a quick hand and then leave.

He stays until the work of healing is complete.

His power never stops working halfway through a task.

And then, on the way to Caesarea Philippi, asks the disciples "*Who do people say that I am?*"

Wonder why Jesus picks this area to ask the question? It's because Caesarea Philippi was a cosmopolitan centre. Many cultures bringing many different beliefs into town. And the attitude of the local government was that all religions were equally valid.... so long as it didn't pinch on a person's loyalty to the crown.

Keep your faith at home.

In public, you are first and foremost a citizen of the state.

Sound familiar?

So - the "set" before the "spike".....

what are all those different opinions floating out there about me?

And then.....

Never mind what ***they*** think.

What do ***YOU*** think?

*Who do ***YOU*** say that I am?*

I can point fingers at others all day long about their opinions and beliefs. But Jesus isn't interested in what I think about their opinions. He is most interested in how

I respond to,

and what ***I*** believe

about ***HIM***.

Who do ***YOU say that I am?***

Today we're beside the disciples.

And Jesus,

 who prepares us and calls us to go and represent him here in this cosmopolitan city
of Ottawa,

 turns to us before he sends us out

 and asks

 "Who do you say that I am?"

That's where all representing Jesus begins.

That's where living as the Body of Christ begins.

As we come to the Communion table, that's the question Jesus wants answered.

Who do you say that I am?

Peter answers on behalf of the rest.

It's the right answer - at least in theory.

The words are right.

"You are the Messiah."

They seem to get it.

He would be the one who would set the people free.

So far, so good.

But then, v. 30 - *"Don't say a thing to anyone."*

Apparently they don't have it quite all together yet.

Like the blind man who saw people as walking trees, so their vision of Jesus is still distorted
and needs further work.

And so the Lord begins to teach them.

That's the last part of our reading.

He speaks to them about who he is as "The Christ," the "Messiah."

Now, quite frankly, I can't blame Peter and the gang for taking the view they did.

Common understanding was that Messiah would be like the great kings in Israel's past:

 David, Hezekiah, Judas Maccabees,

 rid the nation of foreign domination

 win the approval of God

 remove wrongful oppression.

Also - remember what they'd just witnessed.

 The blind man restored to sight.

 And have a peek at the beginning of chapter 8. What goes on there?

 Four thousand are fed.

 And, even earlier, end of chapter 7, what goes on there?

 A deaf man is made to hear.

Jesus is setting wrongs right.
He is shattering bondage.
Heavy goes to light when Jesus shows up.
The hard is made easy.
Put yourself in Peter's shoes.
What would **you** tell Jesus?

And then - What would you think when Jesus starts giving the next level lesson about what this Messiah business is all about?

It's a lesson that seems all backwards.

Tom Wright (*Matthew For Everyone* v.2 p.10) comments how it's like a chapter out of Lewis Carroll's jaberwocky story, *Alice Through The Looking Glass*. Everything seems completely backwards - like you're looking in a mirror. And looking in a mirror makes it terribly difficult to gain your bearings.

Try cutting your own hair in a mirror.

It's all backwards. Everything moves the opposite direction from what you instinctively expect. You can be left frustrated, feeling like Tweedledum.... or dumber.

When Peter thinks that God's kingdom, and freedom, and real life for Israel will come by gathering up an army and marching on Jerusalem, and ridding the land of those dreaded Romans and those pesky Pharisees and Herodians....

Jesus teaches exactly the opposite.

Yes, he will confront evil.

And yes, he will work to set the wrong right, to restore justice, to create hope, to heal hurts, and set free those in bondage.

But he will do it by sinking down into the deepest places of darkness.

Oh, yes, he will conquer.

He will rise from the dead - and in the Resurrection unveil the Kingdom of God come with power.....

....which, in case you were wondering, is what Jesus refers to in Mark 9.1.

He's NOT talking about the second coming.

He's talking about the resurrection.

When the apparently all-powerful chains of death are shattered.

Also very backwards - but in a wonderful sort of way!

And which the disciples **DID** see happen in their lifetime.

Evil will be confronted, and will seem to win, and when it seems to have swallowed up all that is right and good - will then be conquered from the inside out; destroyed right at its very core.

This all seems so backwards to Peter and the boys. That being with Jesus is not first about upward mobility, about getting all of life's illnesses and challenges and inconveniences removed, or about political power or gaining the glory of the crowds, is as disorienting as reading Lewis Carroll's book.

But really - who has it backwards?

God?

Or the disciples and us?

We live in a culture or reach for the top, get to the front of the line, be the last survivor on the island, be the victor in the Amazing Race of life.

But what seems to be the road to success and full living is not always God's way.

And if we were to follow that road, which is so easy to do, which is so wide and inviting, we may, in fact, be going **backwards** when we might think that we are going forward. **Away** from God's call for us rather than towards it. Standing in the way of God's mission, rather than accomplishing it.

Hear the call of Jesus - not just to Peter, but to us.

A three part call.

A call to (do you see the three parts???? v. 34)

- deny ourselves

- take up our cross

- and follow him.

DENY OURSELVES

I want to salute all those involved in this past week's SERVE mission. I salute you for denying yourselves. You didn't get a tangible thing out of this week. Except, maybe, a cold or headache or feeling exhausted or an empty tank of gas in your van, and a week of time that you could have used for something else now gone.

You did it for the SERVE participants and the mentors.

You denied yourself - on behalf of Jesus.

And I believe the Saviour smiled as he watched you serve.

Life as a Christian, life in the Church, is NOT about what I can get out of it. Not about my profit or well-being or self-interest.

It is about being willing to go into the dark and painful and distorted and uncertain places and bringing the presence of Jesus there.

For their sake.

Not ours.

TAKE UP OUR CROSS

Condemned criminals had to take up their cross and carry it to the place of execution. The cross identified them as counter-culture revolutionaries. Everyone knew who they were - because only rebels against Rome were crucified.

Jesus wants us to be public and clear and unashamed about our identification with him.

We are what we are, and we do what we do on behalf of Jesus.
As representatives and friends and followers of Jesus.
No quibbling about that.

Friends, we live in a society where there is growing pressure towards living a secret spiritual life - keep your opinions on matters of faith to yourself. Don't let it affect debate about public policy, or social expectations. Whatever your holy book or religious figure might say about care for the poor or handling of the environment or norms for marriage and sexual conduct – never mind. You keep that to yourself.

Jesus will have none of that kind of blind spirituality. Not back then. And not today.

FOLLOW ME

Now take what we say within these walls, what we will sing and confess as we celebrate the Lord's Supper --- take all that stuff, and make it tangible.

As your neighbors and co-workers watch you live - what do they see?

Is your allegiance to Jesus visible? Or blind? Hidden?

What do they see as being the most important part of your life?

Not what you **say** is important.

But - what do your actions **show** to be most important?

Whatever it is that you pick up and carry around and keep yourself busy with...

...what does that say about you?

As Christ is to the Church, so the Church is to be to the world.

Among us here at Calvin Church, how does that show?