

Excursus 1: An Emerging Model Of Ministry

*“Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”
(Mark 1:38 ESV)*

*Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.”
And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.
(Mark 1:41–42 ESV)*

An Emerging Model Of Ministry

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Mark Chapters 1 to 3

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to the first 3 chapters in the Gospel of Mark. Today we are doing something very different. We left some space in the preaching calendar when we laid out this series so that we could address questions arising from the text or issues arising in the congregation. Today I want to do a little bit of both. This is not strictly a “summary sermon” – we’re not just going to go back and rehash all of what we’ve already seen and said – today I want to ask the FOLLOW UP QUESTION: can what we’ve seen be seen again in our day? Can the church minister in the pattern and POWER of Jesus? That’s the question that is building in my heart. In these last 3 chapters we have seen Jesus preaching and healing and casting out demons and ministering to bodies and to souls and I am wondering and perhaps you are wondering is that just Jesus doing Jesus stuff or is that something we should aspire to? Is that something that filled with the Spirit of Jesus and having been given the authority of Jesus and being called the Body of Jesus – is that something WE SHOULD ASPIRE TO? And if so – how so?

Is there a model for ministry in these chapters? I believe there is and I want to spend some time today working that out. The most obvious thing I think we’ve learned about ministry so far in these 3 chapters is that it should be radically and intentionally Christ Centred.

We've just finished reading through the 5 conflict stories in the Gospel of Mark and in those stories we saw Jesus pressing his identity and significance upon the listening crowds. Jesus was preaching and proclaiming himself! He was pressing people into a corner and he was doing and saying things that only God could do. He was coming at them like a sword and finally in that last story we saw the Pharisees blink. They blink and they duck and they choose the wrong option. Mark records:

they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." (Mark 3:30 ESV)

So they made plans to destroy him.

But the disciples, they go the other way. They decide that he is indeed the Holy One of God. They have seen and understood that in some way Jesus is SPEAKING and ACTING for God. They don't have it all worked out but they understand that in some unique way God is at work in the person of Jesus Christ.

That's what the ministry of Jesus has been about in these first 3 chapters – it has been about his person and his power and his ministry among men and women and so should ours be. Let me suggest that in a Christ centred ministry people LISTEN to Christ as Prophet, they RECEIVE from Christ as Priest and they FOLLOW Christ as King.

Our grandparents used to speak of those things as the mediatorial offices of Christ – its actually in our Statement of Faith, I'm not sure if you remember that. In Section 2 Paragraph B in our statement it says:

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is **the divinely appointed mediator** between God and man. Having taken upon Himself human nature, yet without sin, He perfectly fulfilled the law; suffered and died upon the cross for the salvation of sinners. He was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended to His Father, at whose right hand He ever lives to make intercession for His people. **He holds the offices of Prophet, Priest and King in the church** and He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission.¹

Written right into our Statement of Faith is the desire to be a Christ Centred church responding to all of who Jesus is as God with us; so let me unpack that a little bit. According to our Statement

¹ FBC Orillia Abstract Of Principles, Section 2, Paragraph B.

of Faith, and more importantly, according to the first three chapters in Mark, in a Christ Centred church people:

1. Listen to Christ as Prophet

Do you remember, that was the issue in the 4th conflict story when Jesus permitted his disciples to do some things on the Sabbath that the Pharisees did not permit; and Jesus says:

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27–28 ESV)

I have authority to interpret the Law – I have authority to APPLY the Law! Jesus was not shy about asserting his superior insight and authority. He did not play footsie with competing points of view. He said to the Sadducees:

“You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. (Matthew 22:29 ESV)

You don’t know what you are talking about because you don’t know the Bible and you don’t know God. I on the other wrote the Bible and I am God. So how about you sit down?!

Jesus SPOKE WITH AUTHORITY! He knew what was in the mind of God when these words were written and so he explains them and he applies them according to the Divine Intention – that is what the Pharisees wouldn’t accept – because accepting it would put them out of a job – but that is what was fundamental to the early Jesus movement.

So who are the real disciples in the Jesus’ movement? Mark tells us in Mark 3:33. Jesus said:

“Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34 And looking about at **those who sat around him**, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! (Mark 3:33–34 ESV)

The new covenant community is made up of people who SIT AROUND JESUS and who hang on his every word. That is FUNDAMENTAL – that is FOUNDATIONAL in a Christ centred church. Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is the Wisdom of God. Jesus is the Greater than Moses and the Greater than Solomon – he is the Word made flesh and we LISTEN TO HIM. In a Christ Centred church the Word of Christ has absolute authority.

Secondly, in a Christ centred church people:

2. Receive from Christ as Priest

We've seen a lot of that in these first 3 chapters. People seem to know that if they can close with Jesus they can receive their hearts' desire. In the first conflict story we saw 4 guys digging through a roof so that their friend can close with Jesus. Mark says:

when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5 ESV)

Jesus gave him his heart's desire and quite a bit more. Maybe the best picture of this comes from Mark 1:40. We read there:

a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." (Mark 1:40 ESV)

That's how people come to Jesus in a Christ centred church. They come knowing that only Jesus Christ can give them what they need. They come looking to Jesus for life, for help and for salvation. And if they come in faith, then they hear as the leper heard:

"I will; be clean." (Mark 1:41 ESV)

In a Christ centred church – in Jesus – people discover the goodness and the generosity of God.

Thirdly, in a Christ centred church people:

3. Follow Christ as King

That seems to be the piece that the disciples understood most immediately and most intuitively. People knew that Jesus was the Messiah – the King – before they knew that he was also prophet and priest. Very early on in Mark's Gospel we read things like this:

And immediately they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1:18 ESV)

And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. (Mark 1:20 ESV)

People saw the Royal Majesty of Jesus Christ before they saw everything else. At the halfway point in Mark's Gospel when Jesus gives a sort of mid-term exam – this is the one they got right. In Mark 8 Jesus asked the disciples:

“But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” (Mark 8:29 ESV)

Christ is the Greek word for Messiah which means anointed one or King. This is what they got right! This is what they got first – and interestingly, this is what we get last. We tend to get “priest” first. We love to receive from Jesus. Some of us love “prophet Jesus”. We love reading the Bible through the lens of Jesus Christ and with his help and by His Spirit. But for a lot of us modern day Evangelicals – with all our independence and personal autonomy, this is the one we struggle with the most. And yet Jesus makes it clear that this is non-negotiable. He says:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46 ESV)

I am not your Master unless you are my servant. I am not your King unless you are my subject. Are you my subject? For no man can serve two Masters, you cannot serve both God and ... Anything. Is Christ your one and only Master? Because in a Christ centred church nothing less than whole hearted allegiance is endorsed or accepted.

In a Christ centred church we are sitting around the feet of Jesus, hanging on his every word. We are looking to Jesus as a servant looks to her Master to receive her bread and her provision and her every need. And we are following Jesus. We are walking behind him – never beside him so as to challenge him or correct him. We are behind him – obeying him – trusting him - submitting to him and resting in his authority and care.

That is the very HEART and ESSENCE of a Christ centred church.

And yet, I believe that there is more. There is more to this model – there cannot be less, but I believe there is more. I believe that in the Jesus model there is a non-negotiable centre and there are carefully cultivated margins. Let me explain to you what I mean by that.

Cultivated Margins

I use the phrase “cultivated margins” because the word “margin” can mean something good or something bad. I’m using it in the good sense. I’m thinking of it like the frame on a painting. The frame directs our attention to the picture but the frame can be a work of art in and of itself. That’s what I’m thinking of here. I’m thinking of things that are NOT central but that are still important and that properly used, defined and maintained, can actually direct people’s attention inward. I have two such margins in mind.

Having articulated and advocated for a CHRIST CENTRED APPROACH I also think that if we are going to be faithful to what we see in Scripture and in particular in these first three chapters in Mark I think we also need to cultivate an appreciation for and a commitment to compassionate ministry.

1. Compassionate Ministry

There is no question that Jesus was focused on preaching – he was focused on teaching about himself – his identity and his authority. We’ve been talking about that now several weeks. But there is also no doubt that Jesus was remarkably attentive to human need. There are just too many examples of that in these three chapters for us to deny that.

In Mark 1 – after a big day of preaching – he was resting in Peter’s home and he became aware that Peter’s mother in law was feeling ill and the Bible says:

he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.
(Mark 1:31 ESV)

He didn’t need to do that – he wasn’t sent out TO DO THAT but he did that. He was always doing that. Again and again we read verses like Mark 1:41:

Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him (Mark 1:41 ESV)

Moved with pity. Jesus had a purpose and Jesus had pity and I don’t think you are doing ministry

the Jesus way unless you have BOTH. And so here is what I want to suggest. In a Christ centred church with a commitment to compassionate ministry people:

- a. Respond to the needs in their community

That's what I'm saying! If we are taking the Jesus Model seriously then of course we have a plan and a mandate and of course the centre and substance of that plan and mandate focuses on the person and power of Christ. We are preaching, we are teaching, we are worshipping and we are focused on the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! Yes! Yes and Yes! But if we are taking the Jesus Model seriously then we are not closing our eyes to the needs of the people God puts in front of us! We are not getting distracted by needs way over there that are way beyond our capacity or mandate – but we are not overlooking the needs of the person that is standing in our way. We are RESPONDING with pity to human need. Jesus did that – we must do that.

That was the whole point of the Parable of the Good Samaritan wasn't it? The Priest and the Levite WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY TO AVOID being distracted and delayed by the poor, beaten man who was lying on the road. They were on a mission, they had BUSINESS and they could not be delayed but the Good Samaritan was delayed. He didn't abandon his business, but he did attend to the needs that God put in his path. He picked the man up, brought him to a hotel, bandaged his wounds and paid for his stay. And Jesus said to the young man whose question had occasioned this teaching:

Go, and do thou likewise. (Luke 10:37 KJV)

Go and do thou LIKEWISE! Stay on mission – stay on mandate – but DO NOT TURN ASIDE FROM THE NEEDS THAT GOD PUTS IN YOUR PATH. You are not the church of Jesus Christ if you aren't prepared to make space in your model and your ministry for lots of that.

Secondly, Christ centred churches with a commitment to compassionate ministry are going to:

- b. Help vulnerable and oppressed people move forward into dignity and freedom

I see that pattern in the healings we have observed thus far. I see that in the story of the lame man

who was lowered on a bed through the roof in order to be healed by Jesus. To be a lame man in that culture was to be vulnerable and to lack dignity. They didn't have social safety nets in those days. If you couldn't work then you had to beg and so this man was probably dragged out by his parents every day to a spot by the main road leading from the town to the harbour where people kept their fishing boats. He had probably begged for coins from Peter, James and John but now, because of Jesus he could work. He could be a man. He could stand on his own two feet and earn a living. He could look his friends and family in the eye – that's what this man received from Jesus – he received more than that – but not less than that. Yes, he received forgiveness of sin – HALLELUJAH – but he also received dignity, manhood and personal freedom. Those things matter TOO and so they should matter to us.

We should target our compassionate ministry at the things that dehumanize and enslave men and women. Our gifts should never seek to SUPPLANT normal human labour. The Bible says:

If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:10 ESV)

That's what the Bible says – now the lame man was WILLING TO WORK he was just not able to work and that's where Jesus directed his compassion and that's where we should. We should not seek to further dehumanize people with our charity. Rather we should seek to address barriers, inequities and addictions.

Thirdly, Christ centred churches with a commitment to compassionate ministry are going to:

c. Point people towards the life changing power of Jesus Christ

Everything Jesus did to meet physical needs was intended to direct attention towards his ability to meet ultimate needs. Jesus met people where they were but he always ministered to them in a way that pointed back towards his authority and identity. Think of the fellow with the withered hand. Jesus could have healed him on any day of the week but he healed him intentionally on the Sabbath – in a service – in order to make a larger point about his identity and authority. Jesus understood that if all you receive from him is a physical blessing then you remain in your sin. You'll have a straight hand in hell and he wants more for you than that and we need to want more for people than that.

The best compassionate ministries are those that intentionally point people back to the ultimate meaning and significance of Jesus Christ. Don't just dig a well and give people water – talk to the people at the well about the LIVING WATER that comes from Jesus Christ!

Jil and her team do such a good job with this at Family Circle. They don't just give out groceries or gift certificates or free haircuts – they do that stuff but they tell the ladies that there is a not so secret plan here and the plan is that through these programs and through these gifts you will come to see and love the face of the Ultimate Giver. You will see Jesus and you will come to him and be saved. We don't hide that agenda at all. We tell the ladies that our goal is for them to come for the groceries and to stay for the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Some do. Some don't but its not Christian compassionate unless you keep that very clear.

This cultivated margin has to be there because its there in the ministry of Jesus Christ. You can see it on display in the first 3 chapters of Mark's Gospel. Its not the centre but it is a significant and necessary margin. It's a spotlight and an onramp that leads us to the identity and significance of Christ.

Alright, now I mentioned cultivated MARGIN(S) – plural. There is a second one of these that we have seen time and again in the first 3 chapters Mark. I'm calling this one:

2. Charismatic Ministry

Now – stop! Don't start drafting an email until you hear me out. I know this word has been abused over the last 20-30 years and I know that the 11th commandment in the Evangelical church is “Thou Shalt Condemn And Forbid Anything That Is Ever Abused”. I know that but I also know that this word is in the Bible. The word “charismatic” comes from the Greek word *charisma* which means “gift” or “spiritual gift”² as in:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4 ESV)

According to the Bible the Holy Spirit divinely enables certain sorts of ministries. And according

² BDAG page 1081.

to Mark's record of Jesus' baptism the Holy Spirit descended and remained upon Jesus in a unique way. So everything Jesus did he did according to Mark's Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and therefore, because the Holy Spirit was given to the church in Acts 2 we understand that in some way we have access to that same power for Christian life and ministry. None of us moves in all of the power and gifts of the Spirit like Jesus did but as a group – as a church we are led to expect a variety of gifts from the same Spirit – that's in the Bible so you don't get to reject just because you've seen it abused. Long before the "charismatic excesses" of the last 30 years there was a widespread HUNGER and DESIRE for the power of the Holy Spirit to animate and move through the ministries of the local church. It is only recently that we have come to associate the word "charismatic" with aberrant theology. For crying out loud they used to refer to John Calvin as the "theologian of the Holy Spirit". So a desire for spiritual gifts and for spiritual power is not heretical! It is not foolish. But it can be dangerous. The power of the Holy Spirit is not necessarily safe just like electrical power is not necessarily safe. It depends on how you use it.

So let me take a few minutes and define how I am using this term. When I talk about a church with a carefully cultivated charismatic margin I am talking about a church where people:

a. Pray fervently and with hope

I understand that God does not HEAL everyone – but I also understand that he does heal some. And he heals in response to faithful FERVENT prayer. The Bible says that:

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:16 KJV)

Do you remember that one? That's prayer when you believe that God still moves mountains! That's prayer when you believe that God CARES and God CAN. Do you believe that? Because I believe that and I want us to pray like we believe that.

I want us to do what the Bible says in just about the least charismatic book of the New Testament.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. (James 5:14–15 ESV)

That's not crazy that's just OBEDIENT. That's just believing that if the Bible says it, we should do it and expect God to honour it. Are you with me on that? That's what I mean when I talk about a charismatic margin. I believe that sometimes when God's people pray fervently and with faith he will give a gift of healing through the power of the Holy Spirit. Do you believe that church? I believe that.

Secondly, when I talk about a charismatic margin I am talking about a church where people:

b. Listen carefully for guidance and direction

Now, I'm not talking about people who think they have "revelatory dreams" that other folks should write down and treat like Scripture, I'm talking about believing – like our grandparents did – that God directs and guides his people through the Holy Spirit – often in the very words of Scripture. John Bunyan believed that – the old Baptist pastor. In his autobiography *Grace Abounding To The Chief Of Sinners* he speaks of hearing a loud voice, like an alarm speaking to him and warning him about impending temptations from the devil:

Now about a week or fortnight after this, I was much followed by this Scripture, *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you* (Luke 22:31), and so sometimes it would sound so loud within me, yea, and as it were call so strongly after me, that once above all the rest, I turned my head over my shoulder, thinking verily that some man had behind me called to me, being at a great distance, methought he called so loud...³

John Bunyan heard the voice of the Spirit AUDIBLY directing him in his spiritual battles. Are you ok with that? I'm ok with that! I believe that the church should still be able to say like James said in Acts 15:

it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (Acts 15:28 ESV)

We prayed about it, we read the Bible and the Holy Spirit directed us THUSLY. I'm ok with that – no, no, I so desire that. I so appreciate that each and every time I experience that. I want that to be part of the DNA of our church.

³ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding To The Chief Of Sinners* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 26.

Thirdly and lastly, by a charismatic margin I mean a church that shows people the power and the goodness of Jesus Christ.

c. Show people the power and the goodness of Jesus Christ

The Holy Spirit is given, Jesus says, to glorify him. To glorify Christ. That is to say that Jesus gave the church the Holy Spirit – and the Holy Spirit gives to the church spiritual gifts so that we can SHOW the power and the goodness of Christ. That’s why Jesus did miracles. To show people that the goodness of God had come near in him. Think of how many people in the Bible become full on believers because they were shown an initial physical kindness. Now – not everyone responds that way – not even most! Last week we talked about all those people in the great big crowd who got what they wanted from Jesus and then who went away unsaved and eternally damned. There was a whole crowd of those people. But there always seem to be some who come back and who look deeper and who get saved.

Remember the story of the 10 lepers in Luke 17? Jesus healed 10 lepers and they went away rejoicing but one came back, the Bible says, to give praise to God. To that 1 leper Jesus said this:

“Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:19 ESV)

That 1 leper received a far greater blessing than all the rest. Now I’m not saying that everyone who is healed or helped in a supernatural way will give God the glory that he is due – I am saying some will! And so I don’t want to give this up. I don’t want to throw this tool into the river because some people have made a mess with it. I want to use it – as God permits – as the Spirit wills.

Conclusion:

This is what I see in Holy Scripture. This is what I see in the first 3 chapters of the Gospel of Mark and this is what I aspire to as a church. Christ at the centre with compassionate and charismatic – God honouring, people helping ministry at the margins. For the glory of God and the good of all people I believe that this is the Word and the Will of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let’s pray together.