

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“Attack Ads”**  
**Mark 2:1-22**  
**January 10, 2016**

Three stories today, one right after another in rapid-fire succession: Boom. Boom. Boom. This is how Mark writes his gospel. It's fast paced. He keeps the narrative moving a long.

In fact, he doesn't take time to tell us any of the birth stories about Jesus. There's no nativity, no angels or shepherds, no wise men in Mark. He just jumps right in with John the Baptist preaching and Jesus's baptism and things take off.

Mark doesn't even give us any resurrection appearances of Jesus at the end of the gospel. It's one of the oddities of Mark's writings. He seems to be in a hurry, from start to finish. His stories come in quick. Everyone is moving quickly. In fact, one of the words he uses again and again is **“immediately.”**

He's already over using the word before we get to our readings in Chapter 2 today. In Mark 1, Jesus calls Peter and Andrew to be disciples and **“immediately they left their nets.”** Then Jesus sees James and John fishing and **“immediately he calls to them.”**

And even in our first story this morning, Jesus tells the paralyzed man on the mat to get up and walk, and the Man stands up and **“immediately”** takes his mat and leaves.

Things are happening fast in Marks gospel. He's not wasting any time or any ink or niceties. He's got a story to tell and he wants you to hear it ***now*** and respond ***now*** because now is the time! There is not a moment to waste.

You get a sense of that by the way he sums up Jesus' message at the very beginning. Mark 1:14-15 are considered to be Mark's theme for the whole gospel. It's the summary of everything else that follows and it's Jesus' first words. You can see it there printed on the front of your worship guide.

**“Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘*The time is now! The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news!*’”** Everything in the story that Mark's about to tell flows from that short little summary.

As a church, we're going to pay attention to how that plays itself out over the next few months. From now until Easter we're going to walk through the book of Mark ***in worship*** and I'm going to ask everyone to walk through the book of Mark ***at home***.

It ***is*** the shortest gospel. There are just 16 chapters. And so I'm challenging our entire congregation, young and old, retiree and teenager, parents and children, to read through the whole gospel of Mark at least once between now and Easter Sunday at the end of March.

You've got two and a half months to do it. I think you can handle that.

You're going to hear a lot of it in worship, but you won't hear it all. I want you at home to read through the whole thing. And here's what we're going to do: We're going to put a chart up in the Narthex. And I'm going to ask that whenever you finish... I want you to put a cross up on our chart in the Narthex. So that by the time we get to Easter, we've got 100 or more crosses up there. That's the challenge.

*Can we do that?*

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Today we're jumping into chapter 2 with these three stories and we'd better get started before this fast paced gospel runs away from us. By the end of Chapter 1, Jesus has already been on a preaching tour throughout Galilee. He's cast out demons. Healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law. He's cleansed a leper.

So, by the time we're starting Chapter 2, he's already got quite a following. Which of course means he's got quite a few critics on his tail. We heard them piping in with their jabs and skeptic questions in each of these stories this morning.

You know, if TV attack ads had been around back then, I imagine the scribes and Pharisees would have used those. We've all seen enough of these along the way that you know how it would work.

Just imagine. You're watching TV, and a beautiful scene of the countryside in Galilee comes on the screen. It's a sunny day. There are birds chirping in an olive grove. And then the camera pans over to a crowded house where Jesus is teaching... and then the ominous music begins.

Next thing you know there are four guys, climbing up on the roof carrying someone on a mat. They start tearing a hole in the roof and there's a caption at the bottom: "***Jesus: The Home Wrecker***" And that scary dramatic voice starts narrating: "***You thought he was a teacher. You thought he was a healer. But who is Jesus really?***"

And then suddenly you hear a fuzzy clip of Jesus' voice say, "***Son, your sins are forgiven.***" And then this really awful picture of Jesus in black and white comes up on the screen. The picture was probably taken when he was sneezing or choking on a bite of pita bread because this picture makes him look oddly evil.

And the voice comes back: "***Teacher turns blasphemer. Is this what Israel needs? (Paid for by the Peasants for a Prosperous Palestine Super Pack).***"

The questions getting asked in each of these stories are basically the ancient version of attack ads. Take what Jesus is doing or saying and ask just the right question to undermine what Jesus is actually up to here.

And they're pretty effective at provoking all kinds of fear and doubt... ***because Jesus is most certainly not the status quo.*** What he says and what he does is shocking in all kinds of ways. I mean, maybe he is a blasphemer...

going around acting like God,  
forgiving sins?

Yes, it's a scandalous thing to do. Then again... I imagine the person most scandalized by this pronouncement... *is the man on the mat*. He knows what sins Jesus is talking about...

the sin that still haunts him...

the sin that maybe no one else knows about.

Of course, he wants it to go away, but it won't. It can't. It's just not that simple.

Jesus sees the four friends that carried him there... and knows that these friends must love this guy if they are willing to go through all this. They may not know what's wrong with the paralyzed man, but they know their friend is hurting. And so they bring him to Jesus, even if he can't take himself there, because they're hoping... they're trusting that's where he can find healing.

Jesus sees their faith, the faith of the friends.... and he speaks the divine healing good news that the paralyzed man must come to grips with. **"You're sins are forgiven. It's already true. This is already your reality in God."** Jesus is trying to tell him. **"Don't be paralyzed by it any longer."**

You see, this is a change of heart and mind that needs to take place, for the person trapped on the mat... and for the crowd in the room. That is what repentance is, after all. The putting on of a new mind... a new way of living in this world.

**"Your sins are forgiven,"** he says to the man on the mat. **"Don't be paralyzed by them any longer.**

**Get up.**

**Take that mat of guilt,**

**that mat of cynicism,**

**of shame that you've been laying on,**

**And walk away."**

**"Your sins are forgiven."** This is the unbelievable good news that we're invited to believe. I say it's unbelievable because it's really hard to trust that it's true. Yes, it's one thing to know it. But is all together different to really trust that it's true...to trust enough to surrender to it. Remember, that's what the word "believe" in the bible always means. Belief is never a mental assent, mental agreement with a set of doctrine... not in the bible anyway.

The word always means trusting... and trusting to the point of surrendering yourself to it.

**"Believe in the good news,"** Jesus says. **"The Kingdom of God is at hand."** Trust it. Surrender to it.

**"Believe in me,"** Jesus says. Trust him... and surrender yourself to him.

I know, it's scandalous to give yourself over to anyone like that. But, Jesus is a scandalous presence.

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And it wasn't just in the forgiveness of sins. It was also that way he so flagrantly flaunted the radical grace of God. That's what the second story, is all about.

Jesus goes up to one of those slimy, thieving, lying, cheating tax collectors who, we all know are stealing from us to pad their own pockets. And he invites one of them to be his lead disciple? If that's not bad enough, he doesn't take him to church. He lets this tax collector draw him, Jesus, into one of his hedonistic parties?

Oh this one will play well on the TV. You can just picture it. Someone's used their cell phone and video taped Jesus walking into ***Roxy's strip club over in East St. Louis.*** There's no doubt it's him. You're watching this take place on your TV. You can see his face, clear as day. And as you watch this play out on the TV screen in your living room, you're not sure what to think.

The next scene is Jesus having a few drinks with a rowdy group at Rehab's Bar and Grill. They don't even have to use the scary music this time. Just words on the screen.

**"We all know who Jesus' friends are.  
Is this who you want around your kids?"**

or maybe it would say:

**"Good intentions? Who knows?  
Bad Judgment? Definitely."**

You almost want to say, **"Come on Jesus. You're making this too easy on the opposition."** But Jesus will not stop. Story after story he's breaking the rules... because the Kingdom of God is at hand! It's breaking into our world!

God will not be hidden away only in church building and prayer meetings. The presence of God is bursting out into every dark corner of the world. So no, Jesus won't be defined as a nice guy who hangs out with nice people. He refuses to be so simply domesticated.

Jesus comes to us all... every last one of us, from the button-up too tight, to the loose and wild, to the one so overwhelmed by darkness they can't get out of bed in the morning.

Jesus is coming to them all... which means he is coming to you... right into your home, and he's got some good news for you, **"The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent. Change your way of thinking and believing, and trust in the good news."**

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Well, the attack ads won't stop, will they? We know how the game is played. They only get nastier. So by our third story they are using Jesus' own ally and cousin, John the Baptist. On one side of the screen is John, out in the wilderness, the stark, ascetic that he was... eating locust and honey... teaching his disciples about fasting. On the other side of the screen is Jesus with a glass of wine in his hand... at the table with his

disciples feasting and laughing. And then there is the voice, ***“Did John have the wrong man? This isn’t what the Baptizer taught.”***

And it does makes you wonder, doesn’t it? They do seem awfully different. Even John starts to doubt at one point and sends messengers to Jesus: ***“Are you the one we’ve been waiting for or not?”*** John has them ask. (Luke 7:18-19)

The stark contrast between John’s fasting and Jesus’ feasting does have to make you wonder. What is going on here? Let’s be honest, the attack ads work, don’t they? They have got you doubting.

But maybe, maybe the ancient wisdom from Ecclesiastics can help here: ***“There is a time for everything...” remember?*** After all, John’s time was for preparation, for being ready, for being receptive and open... which is what fasting does for us. But Jesus’ time is for embracing the gift. It’s for entering the life of God... which is full of celebration and joy!

In *Jesus* a great wedding banquet has started. The life of God is bursting forth into our world and into our lives... mingling and uniting with it.

One of the ancient Church Fathers, Maximus the Confessor, puts it this way:  
***Christ, in his love unites created reality with uncreated reality...  
and he shows that through grace the two are become one.  
The whole world enters wholly into the whole of God.”***  
*(Maximus the Confessor)*

We’re being caught up in the life of God. A feast, a party is starting...  
and if you try to keep doing everything the same,  
you’re going to completely miss out!

And so Jesus tells his skeptics: **Look, there is a new wine and a new gladness, and if you try to take the joyous wine and fit it into the same old life you’ve been living, into the same old wineskins, the same old ways of thinking and living and being, this new wine is going to burst out. It’s going to explode all over the place.**

Or if you try to take Jesus and use him as a little patch over one tear in your life, you’re going to be surprised. Jesus will rip open the old clothes you’ve been wearing. Jesus cannot be contained to just one area, or one part of your life!

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In rapid fire succession Mark is telling us story after story that the Kingdom of God is at hand. It is breaking in and it’s happening through Jesus.

So no, maybe things in our world and things in your life aren’t going how you wanted them or how you expected them. But the reality is, God’s Kingdom, God’s Spirit, God’s life is bursting on the scene in Christ.

So, maybe it's time to turn off the TV skepticism that's running in the background, and join in the party!

Sins are being forgiven.  
Healing is flowing into our world.  
All are being welcomed to the feast of God.  
The outcasts are blessed.  
Mountains and being made low and valley are being lifted up and the crooked places made straight.

Joy and gladness are bursting forth... offered to us all.  
The Kingdom of God is at hand.

So things are going to have to change.  
Repent!  
Change your way of thinking.  
Change your heart and lives.  
Believe in the good news. Trust in the good news.  
And drink deeply from the life of God.

Amen.

#### Meditation

*Christ, in his love unites created reality with uncreated reality... and he shows that through grace the two are become one. The whole world enters wholly into the whole of God...*

*- Maximus the Confessor*

*I danced in the morning  
When the world was begun,  
And I danced in the moon  
And the stars and the sun,  
And I came down from heaven  
And I danced on the earth,  
At Bethlehem I had my birth.*

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,  
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,  
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

~Sydney Carter