

## **Sticking To The Plan**

### **Mark 1:29-39**

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once.

Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

And the whole city was gathered around the door.

And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

When they found him, they said to him,

“Everyone is searching for you.”

He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.”

And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

## **Sticking To The Plan**

Mark 1:29-39

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### **I.**

This morning, our job is to make a mountain out of a mole hill; which, as it turns out, is actually more work than you would think.

Today's sermon text from Mark chapter 1 is another in a series of scriptural steps aimed at laying the groundwork for the Lenten season so as to lead us to a fuller understanding of the transformative work of Christ in his dying on the cross and his resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday morning. Whereas last week's text demonstrated the *authority* of Jesus, an authority which I suggested is one rooted in and arising out of hope, and next week's text, the transfiguration of Jesus which serves as the revelation of his *stature* as the long-awaited and prophesied Christ, today's text substantiates the *power* and the *purposefulness* of his earthly ministry of healing and teaching as the means of proclamation.

### **II.**

While most people would never surmise to understand it as such, today is a bit of a "pinch me" moment; certainly from *my* perspective but, hopefully, from the perspective of all of you as well. After today's worship service we will convene our annual meeting of the congregation. The intent of this meeting, supported by a sheaf of papers that constitute the Annual Report which has already been distributed, is to provide a perspective on the state of our church; certainly as it regards the previous year, but also as a positioning for this new year already upon us.

Beyond all the narrative and numbers to be presented at the meeting, and found within the Annual Report itself, the tacit takeaway will be an assessment of the sum relative to the parts. In other words, how does *what* we are doing as a church translate into *how* we are doing as a church? Quite simply, the answer is, we are doing *great*; great, in a "pinch me" kind of way.

### III.

While it certainly would be tempting to rattle off a litany all the incredible things we have accomplished in the past year (and, believe me, after being neck-deep in reports and spreadsheets for the past two weeks I could go for more than a little while) what both excites and pleases me the most is that we are sticking to the plan. Moreover, it is clear the plan is sticking to us.

Today's scripture reading from Mark is, in many ways, a litany of Jesus' miracle making:

*They brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.*

We also discover in today's reading that Jesus recognized the toll these labors took on him physically, emotionally and spiritually, so he was intentional about seeking rest & renewal:

*In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

### IV.

A third and final aspect of today's reading, and the one on which we will focus, is the indication that Jesus was very much aware that a plan was in place and, now, unfolding; and, moreover, the importance of sticking to that plan. Following an evening which saw a great many people cured and healed, apparently these folks stayed close through the night and, come day break, were clamoring for Jesus. After searching for Jesus, Peter finds him, off alone and by himself, and tells him, "(Hey), everyone is searching for you." Rather than following Peter *back*, however, Jesus leads him *forward* saying:

*Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.*

Clearly, Jesus was moving through his earthly ministry with intentionality, either as the maker *of* the plan or as participant *in* the plan (or both) toward some end; the exact nature of which he may, or may not, have explicitly known. One thing *is* for sure, though, Jesus knew he needed to reach that end.

## V.

That there was a plan to which Jesus was sticking is really no surprise to us, nor should it be. As his followers, we have pushed all our chips into the middle of the table betting on the fact that Christ's death on the cross to redeem the creation from sin has *always* been part of God's plan for the world. What *is* surprising, is our seeming inability to believe that such a plan is unfolding still *and* that we are very much part of it.

One of the chief reasons for such disbelief is our nagging need for linearity. When we hear talk of a plan, any plan, we immediately think Point A to Point B. However, when we cannot identify the causal relationships which move the plan along from one point to another, we allow ourselves to suspect that maybe there is no plan and, hence, that we are not part of the plan. The claim I would put before us, though, one which is at least hinted at in this morning's scripture reading, is that nothing could be further from the truth.

## VI.

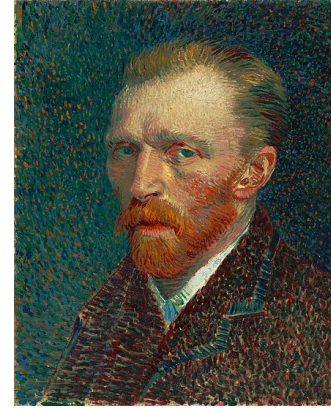
I would like to suggest that God's plan for this world lies in the points themselves, and is in no way reliant on our ability to make the connections between them. This is fairly challenging for us to comprehend, conceptually, as I am sure was the case with Peter when Jesus told him it was time to move on. No doubt Peter and all the disciples would have been greatly relieved to rest a bit and just ride the coat-tails of a job well done. Jesus knew, however, the importance of sticking to the plan.

As a tool to both help and to expand our comprehension and conception of God's plan, let us take a brief detour into the world of art. After many centuries of coloring within the lines of Realism where "what you see is what you paint," the 1800s brought a shift to Impressionism where "how you see and imagine is what you paint." Later, Neo-Impressionists like Seurat and Signac would take this a step further to "how you paint is what you see"; this came to be known as "Pointallism."

## VII.

Pointallism is practice of applying small strokes or dots of color to a canvas, then relying of the ability of the eye and mind of the viewer to blend the color spots (or points) into a fuller range of tones when looked at from a distance.

Two well-known examples of Pointillism are Seurat's "A Sunday on La Grande Jatte" (1884) and Van Gogh's "Self Portrait" (1887).



For those who have eyes to see, Pointillism resembles God's plan for the world: not only is the sum greater than the parts (or points) the plan only comes into view when we step back and see the big picture. Which is why a day like today, when we convene the annual meeting of the congregation, is so important. It is an opportunity for us to take that step back and see our church for what it is: a collection of points expressed in a non-linear fashion which help to form and make real God's unfolding plan for the world.

### **VIII.**

At the start of the sermon I expressed my belief that, given sufficient perspective, our church is doing *great*. Certainly, one might examine any one particular point that constitutes the life of our church and determine we could, should, or will do better. More certain, is that whatever "success" we might be having these days does not adhere of any kind of identifiable intentional linearity.

What matters most for our church is not one particular point or another, nor is it the movement from Point A to Point B in any kind of straight line. Instead, we just keep sticking to the plan by putting points on the canvas; here, there, and everywhere we can manage and imagine. Points of love, compassion, fellowship, outreach, forgiveness, and support. In these points, and these points alone, lie the power and purposefulness of Christ made real in his body, the church.

## **IX.**

Another thing which is for certain, is that such a pointillistic process is actually more work than you would think simply by virtue of having to both imagine, and believe in the “Big Picture” these points are becoming. However, given enough perspective, of both time and distance, such a “ministry of mole hills” becomes a masterpiece of a mountain.

The future of the church, this church and every other, lies not in returning with Peter to the past, but by following Christ forward into the future. In a fashion resembling what occurs in today’s scripture reading, let us *just keep going*; going to our neighbors, and also going to those in neighboring towns, using healing and teaching as the means of proclamation. For this is what we have been put here to do as part of God’s unfolding plan for the world. Let’s keep sticking to the plan; because, as we here at the Church on the Park have discovered through the transformative work of Christ, the plan sure is sticking with us. Amen.