

Sunday, August 27, 2017  
St. Giles' Presbyterian Church  
Learning the First Step of the Dance

### **A history of Al's dancing**

I don't know if that happened to you, but when I was growing up in Toronto, I was one of those kids who NEVER went to the school dance. I was one of those nerdy kids who wore the two bar aviator glasses. In elementary school, I went to a Christian school, People's Christian Academy that was run by the People's Church, the mega church in Toronto.

The thing about going to a Christian School was that we didn't have a school dance, at least not that I remember. Having graduated from the elementary school, my parents took me out of the People's Christian Academy and sent me to North Toronto Collegiate, which is in the heart of midtown Toronto. At this brand new public school, I remember every so often during the school year, they would hold dances. There was one dance in the fall, one in the winter and of course the one in the spring known as the prom. I remember my friends going and telling me that it was a good time. But I never went. It's not that I didn't WANT to go. I think that it was because dancing never really interested me.

But as I got older, and my friends were getting married, I remember spending a lot of my summers in my twenties, going to a lot of weddings. And, after the ceremony and the reception, there usually would be a DJ and my friends and I would dance the night away.

But let me tell you this, those first couple of weddings, when it came to “the dance”, I got nervous. I mean, I’d never really danced before up until then. And to dance in front of my friends? As a twenty something year old with two left feet? THAT was nerve wracking.

### **Dancing Analogies**

Practicing the Christian faith is kind of like that, isn’t it? We see other people do it. They serve in church, they become involved in the life of the community and you say to yourself, I want to do that too! But when it comes time to take part, when it is your turn, some people might feel anxious or nervous. Is this what it’s supposed to look like? Am I doing it right?

Or if you think about the dance analogy, others might be timid in joining. And some might need to be invited to take part. And as they participate in being part of the Christian faith, like dancing, you get the hang of it. And it becomes a part of who you are.

Or, if you think about the dance analogy, others might see what others are doing, think this is a great idea and it’s just natural. They jump in with two feet. They learn how to practice the faith, but almost instantly they are instep with what is going on.

## Introducing last week

Last week, we talked about “the Dance”. And in that we looked at the triune God, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In The Dance, we saw that in Jesus’ baptism, all three parts of the triune God were represented in the dove during this time. In Jesus baptism, we were told that

**[SLIDE: picture of Jesus’ Baptism]**

***<sup>10</sup> Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” – Mark 1: 10-11***

Do you see the image of Jesus’ baptism? In this one instance, we’re reminded that Jesus was covered by the love of the Father. The Father says it straight away.

Jesus, you are my son.

Jesus, I love you.

Jesus, I am pleased with you.

How powerful are those words coming from God the Father!

And the Spirit, descending on Jesus, covering him with his power!

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, present together at one place and one time.

And last week, we were reminded that this was a reflection of the interior life of the Triune God. This kind of relationship has been happening for all of eternity. This kind of relationship, this kind of dance has been modeled for us since the beginning! THIS is the kind of dance that we as Christ followers should be striving for.

But what does The Dance look like for us as human beings? This week, we'll dive into the scriptures and into Mark chapter 2 to find out.

### **The First Step of the Dance**

And as we do this, we'll first take a look at where we left off in Mark Chapter 1. If you'll remember, last week, we looked at Mark 1: 9-20. And in that passage, we saw that Mark records for us three events. Those three events were

- (1) The baptism of Jesus
- (2) Jesus Announces the Good News
- (3) Jesus Calls his First Disciples

And in that you'll remember that Jesus announces that the good news that the Kingdom of God is near! Jesus says repent! The way that you have lived in the past is NOT the way God WANTS you to live!

The word REPENT is an important word and in fact in the sermon series on Joseph that our pastor, The Rev. Herb Hilder preached in July and August centres on this. If you remember the story of Joseph, he was sold into slavery into the land of Egypt. And in THAT story, you'll remember that Joseph goes from being in prison to becoming the viceroy, the most powerful person in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. After Joseph becomes the viceroy, you'll remember that his brothers HAD to go to Egypt to look for food because of the famine. And in that exchange, you'll remember that Joseph and his brothers finally reconcile after YEARS of being estranged to one another. In Pastor Herb's sermon, he gave us THIS quote that we shouldn't forget. Herb says this,

***"Without repentance, there is no reconciliation." Rev. Herb Hilder, July 2017.***

The theology of reconciliation is one that is found throughout the scriptures. We are a broken people and God wants to reconcile with us. He sends Jesus to us to show us the way. And ultimately, it is only through Jesus dying on the cross that we are reconciled to God. But before there is reconciliation, there must ALSO be repentance. We must TURN BACK. We cannot continue on this path of destruction.

And Jesus announces this hand in hand with the good news. The Kingdom of God is near, so repent!

Repentance is part of the dance and we find that Mark builds to this in his first chapter.

After Jesus announces the good news and calls his first disciples in order to teach them The Dance, we find Mark bringing to his readers' attention three events that happen before he gets to Mark chapter 2. Those three events are

- (1) Jesus healing many people, including Peter's mother in law. Jesus also heals others who have sickness and are demon possessed.
- (2) The second event that Mark records is that Jesus' popularity grows because of these healings, he doesn't revel in it, but instead he finds a solitary place to pray.
- (3) And finally, Marks tells us that Jesus heals a man with leprosy. In this instance, we're told that Jesus tells the man to NOT tell others about what he had done. He says, go show yourself to the priest and be certified that you are clean! But instead of doing this, the man goes out and tells of the good news that he has been healed! In all of this, Jesus' popularity grows and grows.

## **The Interior Life of Christ**

In this, we see that Mark is building up to something bigger. Yes, we see that people are becoming healed of their physical illness. But this is only one step in the restoration of their lives. Mark is pointing to something deeper and we find him hinting at this when Jesus finds a solitary place to pray.

The account of Jesus finding a solitary place to pray would be the complete opposite of what I would do. Think about it.

In our every day lives, if we are being commended for a job well done, what usually happens?

We get energized.

We get invigorated.

There's a saying that if you find a job that you love, you'll never work a day in your life.

We get that. We understand that. We feel that. But Jesus doesn't do this. Why? Because this kind of feeling is rooted in other people's reactions.

If what we do is anchored into other people's reactions and expectations, very easily the opposite can happen. What happens if you do a job and immediately people jump on you and tell you that what you are doing isn't good enough.

You feel dejected, You feel discouraged.

Jesus understands this. And so he wakes up early in the morning to pray. And the praying that he does isn't the kind of thirty-second prayers that we might be used to. He is in deep communion with God the Father. He is spending hours praying. Because THIS is where he receives the strength to continue on. Remember, this is only the beginning of his ministry. And instead of turning to God when times are tough, Jesus is building into practice an interior life that will sustain him in the good times AND the bad.

In prayer with God he is energized. In communion with The Father, he is invigorated.

And so instead of drawing his energy from the crowds who are beginning to flock to him, he says, let's go to the nearby villages that haven't heard of the good news.

Let's stay true to our core value and principles. People need to hear that the Kingdom of God is near and to repent! And he does that and



we're told that Jesus travels all along the Galilee, preaching and driving out demons.

## **Mark chapter 2**

Mark uses these events to build up to chapter 2, where we find Jesus a few days later. We're told that Jesus once again enters Capernaum and he is preaching and teaching people in a home. Now this passage is pretty famous and we remember it because of that dramatic scene that happens. There were so many people that had gathered in a home, a paralyzed person is literally lowered into the room by his friends.

Now this passage is important because of what Jesus does. Instead of Jesus just healing the man, he instead has a full conversation with him. Can you imagine the scene if you were there? Jesus is teaching all of these people and then suddenly you notice that part of the roof starts disappearing.

Maybe it begins with dust descending on everyone and people look up to see what is happening. There is no more ceiling above them and then all of a sudden, there is daylight. And the next thing you know, a person is being slowly lowered to the floor. We've heard this passage many times, but WHAT makes this one different than the previous ones to it?

What is different is that Mark records that Jesus takes his healing deeper. Instead of just healing the paralyzed man of his physical ailment, Jesus first forgives his sin. Now this is important because it is entirely out of character for anyone else to do this. A paralyzed man is brought to Jesus; he's lowered into the home. He and his friends are expecting. They're hoping. They want a miracle of healing. Can you imagine the anticipation that this man would have had? And Jesus says to him,

***"Son, your sins have been forgiven." - Mark 2: 5***

I'm not going to lie. IF I were this paralyzed man, I'd be going from waiting and hoping to being devastated. Sitting here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I can ask myself. Why? Because I've heard all of the other stories. There's a precedence here, isn't there? I've heard that Jesus had healed people that were demon possessed! I'd heard that Jesus had healed fevers. I'd heard that he even healed leprosy! And this is huge.

Because leprosy is defined today as this:

***Hansen's disease (also known as leprosy) is an infection caused by slow-growing bacteria called Mycobacterium leprae. It can affect the nerves, skin, eyes, and lining of the nose (nasal mucosa). ... Leprosy was once feared as a highly contagious and devastating disease, but now we know it doesn't spread easily and treatment is very effective. However, if left untreated, the nerve damage can***

***result in crippling of hands and feet, paralysis, and blindness. - Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.***

People in Jesus' day believed that leprosy was highly contagious and when a person was diagnosed to have leprosy, they would be excommunicated from society. They would be told that they needed to live outside of the town or village and THAT meant that they not only were left to deal with the disease on their own, but they were also cut off from EVERYONE. It was in essence a death sentence.

And so if I were the paralyzed man and I heard that Jesus had healed people with leprosy, my expectations would be huge!

But Jesus, he says to the man, "your sins have been forgiven."

Now the passage doesn't end there. Because the teachers of the law, the academics became indignant with Jesus. They become indignant with Jesus NOT because Jesus didn't heal the paralyzed man of his condition. Instead, they became indignant because Jesus forgave the man's sin.

What an odd thing to get mad at. But the conclusion that the teachers of the law had jumped to was this. Jesus forgave the man's sin and only God could do this. And so if JESUS forgave the man's sin, the implication was that Jesus was saying that HE was

God. By saying this, the teachers of the law felt that HE was blaspheming. And being the gatekeepers of the Jewish law, the teachers of the law were FURIOUS with Jesus.

It's like saying, ok. Jesus, you are a great teacher. AND you are also a great healer of PHYSICAL sickness. That's ok in our books. But when you begin to claim the authority that only GOD has, that's where you've crossed the line.

Forgiving people of their sins is the first time that Jesus does this in the book of Mark. And there are biblical scholars who believe that it is in Mark chapter 2 that the shadow of the cross FIRST falls on Jesus. And the reason for this is because Jesus is claiming that he IS God. And by making this claim, he has sealed his fate because eventually the teachers of the law would begin to plot on how to execute Jesus.

This is the theological explanation that we get when we read this scripture. But what about the practical implication of what Jesus is saying here?

By saying, "Son your sins have been forgiven", Jesus is digging deeper into the paralyzed man's life.

What I mean is this.

Jesus is saying, yes your physical body needs healing. But there's something more that you need. And that need is connected to your soul. You are broken

not only physically, but also spiritually. Your spiritual brokenness is rooted in the fact that God is not at the centre of your life. In the analogy of The Dance, you are “out of step”. And I, Jesus, I can bring healing to this part of your life.

Timothy Keller puts it like this:

*“That’s why, when Jesus look at the paralyzed man and says, “Your sins are forgiven,” he’s actually saying, “Your sins have really been against me.” The only person who can possibly say that to a human being would be their Creator. Jesus Christ, by forgiving the man, is claiming to be God Almighty.” – Timothy Keller, Kindle location 573 King’s Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus.*

And through this passage, we can see that the First Step of The Dance is to be forgiven by Christ. It is only through this forgiveness that we can be reconciled to God. And it is only through this reconciliation that we can begin to dance like the triune God, The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

**Take up your mat and go!**

Getting back to the book of Mark, we see that the passage veers in a very different direction. We’re told that Jesus knew the hearts of the teachers of the law and how

furious they were with his claim that he was God by forgiving the man's sin. And because of this, Jesus asks them a very important question:

***<sup>9</sup> Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? – Mark 2: 9***

This question is important because it's one that has been debated over and over again. WHICH is easier? To forgive someone's sin or tell them to take up their mat and walk?

WHO can do this?

The process that modern day doctors have to go through when they see a patient is complicated. And in general terms it goes something like this.

1. The doctors sees the patient and takes a history of the problem (so for example seeing what the problem is and what kind of symptoms the patient is experiencing.. After that they do a physical examine.
2. The doctor has to review the investigation that has already been done or they have to order an investigation to BE done.
3. Then the doctor has to diagnose the problem
4. Then the doctor has to make recommendations on the treatment with options and decide on the course of action.

5. Then the treatment has to be administered.
6. After the treatment has been administered, the next step is to see the patient in follow up to assess the treatment as well as to monitor the side effects.

Even in our modern medicine, no doctor can just say, get up, take your mat and go.

But when we stop and think about it. What has Jesus already done? Jesus has already forgiven the man's sins.

Only God himself can forgive someone's sin. Which means that Jesus is MUCH MORE than just a miracle healer.

And what are the implications for someone's sins to be forgiven? First it means that they have been reconciled with God.

And being reconciled to God means that they were now part of the Dance. Do you remember last week when we talked about the ebb and flow of the triune God? The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, covered each other with love and power. The paralyzed man was now a part of it.

Having your sins forgiven meant God is at the centre of it all. And like Jesus who was tempted by Satan with the temptations of the flesh, the temptations of pride

and the temptations of power, having God at the centre of it all means that we leave all of those things behind!

And so going back to the question, which is easier? Is it easier to be healed physically in an instant or being reconciled to God? I don't think there is a clear-cut answer. I believe that they are BOTH equally difficult for humans to achieve. But, with the power of Christ, they are both equally easy.

And this is the gospel. Jesus has the power to heal both. Jesus has the power to heal both our souls and our body. And, when we read Mark chapter 2, he is willing to do this freely with grace, even though we don't deserve it.

And this is good news.

### **Conclusion: The practical**

In Church we've heard about the forgiveness of sins. But it's the healing of the soul that is often neglected. It's something that we don't talk about enough but it is essential if we are to get in step with the dance. The healing of the soul is complicated, yet it is something that is very real and present even today.

And it is through the community of faith, the Church, that this is accomplished. Remember that the book of Mark was written so that its earliest readers could come



to know who Jesus Christ truly is. And the beautiful thing about all of this was that Jesus invited regular people like you and I to be a part of the journey.

Like the disciples that were called to leave their fishing nets and to follow Jesus, we too have been invited to do the same. We are to fish for people. We are to tell people of the good news that Jesus can bring healing.

And the question then becomes, how do we do this? In the same way that Jesus forgives the paralyzed man of his sins, we can do the same thing for others. I'm not suggesting that we can absolve people of their sins like Jesus does. Only God the Father can forgive the sins of people.

But what I am saying is that we can begin to forgive others of the sins that they have done against us. Like the Lord's Prayer that we pray every week at St. Giles' we say,

"Forgive our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors."

You see how this sentence has been constructed?

Often times we say this line and we are asking God to forgive ONLY our debts or our sins. But the way that Jesus has taught us to pray is that WE have to forgive the people who have wronged US first.

This kind of forgiveness can only come from a spiritually healthy place. We can only receive forgiveness if we have forgiven others of the same thing. But when that happens, there is liberation; there is freedom on both sides.

Forgiveness is an interesting thing. Often times we think that WE hold the cards when it comes to forgiveness. We think in terms of equality and justice. If someone has wronged ME, then I hold all of the power.

But what happens when we hold a grudge?

In my experience, it gnaws at my soul. I can't stop thinking about the other person and what they've done to ME. I hold the keys to this situation. But is that really true? No. Because I can't stop thinking about what has happened, really the power is held over MY head. I am the one that suffers.

This gnawing of the soul is a symptom of spiritual unhealth. Why is it spiritually unhealthy? Because the focus of my attention becomes centered on me. And when I make my focus all about me, God is no longer at the centre of my life.

Instead of making the situation all about ME, we are told to forgive others first. Even in the Lord's Prayer, the implications for asking for forgiveness from our Heavenly Father is that we've ALREADY done the same thing for others. In the forgiveness of sins, we find a kind of freedom there that truly lasts.

And what happens when we forgive, the process of reconciliation, the mending of the broken relationship can begin to happen. And what happens when full reconciliation begins? We can begin to get in step with what The Dance really looks like. The ebb and flow of relationship can begin to happen again.

Friends, when we think about The Dance that we have been invited to, it would be wise for us to remember the passage from Mark chapter 2. Jesus Christ has come into the world to show us how to dance. And the forgiveness of sins and the healing of the soul is where it all begins.

Amen.