

Mark 1:21-45

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

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 him about her at once. He 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 sunset, 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.

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

John 11:1,3-7, 17-29,32-35,38-44

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.'

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep.

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

To recap where we are in the story, John the Baptist has appeared in the wilderness and predicted Jesus' coming. He has baptized Jesus, who immediately went out into the wilderness to be tempted for forty days. Jesus has started preaching that the kingdom of God has come near, and he's called his first disciples. That's the first half of chapter one.

I suspect that, if Mark were writing a book today, his editor would tell him to slow down, space this stuff out some.

Now, Jesus and his disciples go to Capernaum, a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee.¹ This is apparently where Simon and Andrew and James and John, his first disciples, all lived before they started following Jesus. It's the Sabbath, so Jesus goes into the synagogue and preaches.

Jesus does not preach timidly. He does not hesitate to call a spade a spade, or to tell people plainly what Scripture means, whether they want to hear it or not. Even demonic spirits obey him, to the point of staying silent on command.

The people of Capernaum are amazed, and call Jesus' teaching "A new teaching – with authority!"

The people are half-right. Jesus has rightful authority, but what he teaches is not new. He is teaching much of the same things about the Kingdom of Heaven that all the prophets have always taught, and the people have not listened.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capernaum>

You know, things like, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.” These are some of Jesus’ key teachings. He taught that they are the two most important commands for people of God.² Then and now.

The *Shema*, the centerpiece of morning and evening synagogue prayer services, is from Deuteronomy. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”³

Leviticus commands all the people of God, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord [, and I say so].”⁴

The people may have been commanded to, “teach [these commands] diligently to [their] children, and ... talk of them when [they] sit in [their] houses, when [they] walk by the way, when [they] lie down, and when [they] rise up,”⁵ but it doesn’t seem like they did it, if they believe that what Jesus has to say is a completely new teaching.

Jesus goes on to heal Simon’s mother-in-law and all the people who come to him for healing. He spends an evening doing that, and goes to bed.

² Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27. John 13:34-35 say to love each other, but that’s not the same thing.

³ Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

⁴ Leviticus 19:18.

⁵ Deuteronomy 6:7.

Early in the morning, Jesus has a choice to make. He can stay in Capernaum, and turn into their village healer, an essentially tame manifestation of God's power. That's the safe choice, being no threat to anybody.

Or he can go on to other towns, preaching his message and healing people and casting out demons.

He goes out alone and prays, and then, when his disciples find him, they go on. Jesus keeps doing the same kind of thing that he did in Capernaum: teaching and healing.

When a leper finds Jesus, he begs Jesus to make him clean.

Lepers in Jesus' day have a particularly hard life. They are outcast from their families, from their homes, from everything and everyone whom they love. They are cast out of the community until a priest examines them and says that they are clean.⁶

Jesus touches the leper, and makes him clean. Jesus changes his life forever, and tells him not to tell anybody who healed him, but, of course, he does.

When I was a kid, I thought that it was terrible that Jesus would tell people not to tell anyone who healed them or how they got healed. This passage, though, explains why Jesus does that.

⁶ Leviticus 13-14.

After Jesus cleanses this leper, “Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.” He had trouble getting to teach or do anything else, other than heal people.

Jesus did not come down here to be a local village healer.

If the point of his coming were to be a healer, he would have set up shop in a big city, where he would see more people, and healed people from sunup to sundown.

Jesus is more than a local doctor. He is more even than a celebrity healer. Jesus is the Word of God made Flesh. Jesus is the Son of God. He came down here on a mission.

Jesus is here to teach people the same things that the prophets have been saying for generations. But God has noticed that, while there were a few saints in each generation, most of the people don’t seem to get the message. So Jesus is teaching the same material in a different way.

Jesus does not restrict himself to teaching scholars and those who know a lot already. He teaches anyone who will listen.

Jesus teaches by example. He genuinely loves God, and he genuinely loves the people around him.

When Lazarus dies, Jesus cries.⁷

He knew that Lazarus was going to die. He knew when he got the message that Lazarus would die before he got there.⁸

But still Jesus cries.

He knows that he's going to raise Lazarus from the dead.

But still Jesus cries.

He knows that Lazarus will outlive him.⁹

But still Jesus cries.

Crying when someone you love dies is natural. Grief is part of love. The more you love someone, the more you share their pain when they are hurting. The more you loved someone, the more you grieve when you lose them.

In this case, Jesus knows that he hasn't really lost Lazarus, but he knows that his friends Mary and Martha are in pain.

Jesus does what he can to ease their pain. He raises Lazarus from the dead. But all through the story he keeps stopping and teaching the people what this means.

⁷ John 11:35.

⁸ He stayed where he was two days; he arrived to find that Lazarus had been in the ground four days. Had he dropped everything and started walking the minute he got the news, he would have arrived two days after Lazarus' death, not four. Not much difference.

⁹ No matter which legend you believe, whether he died again and was buried in present-day Larnaka, Cyprus, or Marseilles, France, he lived significantly past the Crucifixion and the Ascension.

Jesus did not come to earth to be a healer. He came to teach people and to save them.

But he has the power to heal people, and he really loves the people around him, so he keeps healing them and restoring them back to their place in the community. The leper is pronounced clean, and he goes back to his family. Simon's mother-in-law goes back to hosting her son's friends in her house. And Lazarus, Lazarus goes back to supporting his family.

And Jesus never stops teaching people. He loves them, and he sees that they are living in ways that cause themselves and their neighbors pain. He came to save the world. Healing a few thousand people over the time he is on the earth is not going to do it. Teaching people how to live like they are children of God, surrounded by other children of God, that's going to change the world.

A while back there was a fad related to the saying, "WWJD?", or "What Would Jesus Do?" A few million plastic bracelets were sold in the 1990's, and the phrase has become a cliché. At first glance, it is not always a useful question. Jesus saw people in pain, and he healed the sick and raised the dead. We can't do that.

But there's a deeper answer to that question. Yes, Jesus healed people. But first he loved them, and then he did what he could to help them:

to ease their pain, and to restore them to where they belonged in the community. The healing was not the point. The love was.

We can do that. Every one of us can look at the people around us, and love them. Every one of us can look for ways to help ease their pain. Every one of us can look for ways to restore people to where they belong.

We can feed the hungry. We can give water to the thirsty. We can treat everyone we meet with the dignity befitting a human being made in the image of God. Because there aren't any other kind of human beings out there.

So go out there, and love the people you see! Because that's how we imitate Christ, and how we can change the world.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.