ReMARKable: From Homerun to Strikeout (Ch. 6) Scripture Reading: Mark 6

Feb. 16th, 2025 Memory Verse: Mark 6:46

**[SLIDE 1]**

 Last week Mark took us across the Sea of Galilee and back. Jesus healed a Gerasene man, a Gentile, possessed by a legion of demons. He sent the demons into a giant herd of pigs who then plummeted into the sea. This shows us that Jesus’ work and ministry is not limited to the Jewish world. He has power even in unclean places! The man who was healed wants to follow Jesus but Jesus refuses him and instead commissions the man to go a tell everyone what God has done for him. Jesus makes his mark. He leaves the man completely transformed and he takes his story to others. The rest of the town is relieved that Jesus he is going back home.

 Back on the Jewish side of the lake, we see Jesus healing a woman with a bleeding problem and then raising a young girl who had just died. Overall, in this gospel, Jesus is doing so many amazing and unheard of things. Mark reports on these events in such quick succession that we might get a little “miracle fatigue”. **[SLIDE 2]** We can get fatigued if we are exposed to too much of something for too long. It’s a lot like how many people feel about superhero movies.

**[SLIDE 3]** It seems like every other movie that is released lately involves some kind of super characters. They have amazing powers and do amazing things. These movies are bright and flashy and action-packed…and people have just become tired of them (at least they don’t make as much money as they used to). If everyone we see on the screen is super, than no one is. The final climactic battle between the villain and the hero just does not seem that impressive or engaging when you have watched a similar scene so many times before.

 This kind of fatigue can plague our faith as well. **[SLIDE 4]** The gospel is a story that has eternal impact. It has the power to change hearts and lives, to bring broken people back to God. Romans 1:16 sums it up: **[SLIDE 5]** The gospel is the very power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. It is the very power of God!

 But the power of the story can fade over the course of time. Many Christians who are well-progressed in their walk with the Lord do not have the same excitement or awe that they once had when they think about the gospel that has saved them. Over the years, salvation has become their norm…it is no longer a new experience.

 So as Mark tells us over and over again about the many miracles and healings and exorcisms that Jesus performs…we begin the feel the impact of those stories a little less. But remember, Mark is a reporter. He is not trying to write a novel that elicits an emotional response from his readers. He is not so concerned about overexposing us to a barrage of miracle stories in a short amount of time. He is trying to tell us about Jesus! **[SLIDE 6]** He is trying to share with us Good News! So, if you feel a weariness or a fatigue when it come to the gospel or your faith, I just want to encourage you to push through; keep studying, keep praying, keep seeking, keep sharing. Don’t let up, don’t get distracted. Mark knows that time is short and that the gospel is worth everything. If we keep ourselves exposed to God’s word, and we allow the Holy Spirit to do his work, we will find that he will make us into useful disciples and our zeal and passion will be rekindled.

 So, with that said, Mark six takes us back to Jesus’ hometown, Nazareth. **[SLIDE 7]** But he is not there to just reconnect and catch up with friends and family. Jesus is working. He comes home as a Rabbi with his students and all following him and, as any rabbi would, Jesus starts teaching in the synagogue. Now, public opinion would deem Jesus a great teacher and a wonderful communicator, but here in the home crowd, the reaction is the opposite. The CEB says people were **[SLIDE 8]** “repulsed” by him. The actual Greek word here is *skandalidzo.* Now what does that sound like? It means to cause one to stumble or sin. Jesus is not causing anyone to sin, but seeing this hometown working boy stand up and teach with such authority scandalized the crowd. They were offended. They knew him, they knew his family. To repent and embrace this good news just because Mary’s boy says so just doesn’t add up. So, hearing Jesus preach was about all they could do since Jesus was unable to do many miracles due to their hard hearts. Verse six says Jesus was appalled. **[SLIDE 9]** So instead of hitting us with another amazing miracle, just when it might seem that miracles are the norm, Mark presents to us an un-miracle story. And it sort of slaps us in the face…oh yeah, this is how life is without Jesus…rather un-miraculous.

 Disappointed but undeterred Jesus moves on to other villages. He pairs up his disciples and sends them out two by two. Jesus is doubling down on the authority **[SLIDE 10l** he gave to them in chapter three. Remember, Jesus’ authority is communicable – he gives it to those he sends. Here they are expressly equipped to cast out demons. And this authority from Jesus is really their only resource. They take virtually nothing with them. And two by two they travel from town to town preaching a message of repentance which, let’s be honest, is a disturbing, offensive message. Who wants to hear that they are wrong and need to change? Before we can live for God, we must firstdie to ourselves. That is a painful process. But this is the Good News **[SLIDE 11]** and this is the message of the King. Verse 13 tells us that this preaching tour was a great success. These disciples were faithful to preach, and they were able to cast out demons. They were able to heal sick people. Hallelujah! Everything seems to be falling into place! Jesus’ message is on the move, his brand is growing and even his franchisees can get the same amazing results! It’s a homerun!

 Then Mark hits the brakes…hard! **[SLIDE 12]** Instead of his normal play by play reporting, he takes us on a long and detailed flashback about how John the Baptist met his end. The account is very involved and filled with gruesome detail, but instead of focusing on the story, I want to pull back and think about what Mark is doing as a reporter. Yes, he is telling us about John the Baptist, but he is more importantly foreshadowing for us what is going to happen to Jesus. There are certainly some similarities: **[SLIDE 13]** such as a ruler who actually finds no fault in the one to be killed. Herod, we are told, like John and Pilate, in the end, considers Jesus to be innocent. But both of these rulers gives in to the will of the mob. A ruler who is manipulated to carry out a decree of death. Herod acts out the whims of his wife and cannot go back on his decision because of the pressure of his banquet guests and Pilate gives in to the shouting of the angry mob. Herod is a picture of Pontus Pilate, and John of course reflects the plight of Jesus himself.

 Right after this foreshadowing flashback, **[SLIDE 14]** ((the disciples reconvene with Jesus and report on the great work they had done. Jesus knows that ministry is a draining process. We saw this last week when Jesus was touched by the bleeding woman and power went out from him. Jesus knew that these men need to be refueled and find some quiet rest with God. So, they set sail to seek out a remote place where they can retreat. But it is not to be. Someone somewhere knew about their plans and when Jesus and the disciples reach their destination a huge crowd **[SLIDE 15]** is already there. Again, we see Jesus interrupted. His plans foiled, his time alone completely disrespected. And his response to the mewing masses…is…compassion. **[SLIDE 16]** Verse 34, he sees them as sheep without a shepherd. They needed his help. So, as tired as he is, as derailed as his day has been, Jesus begins to teach them. Soon enough it became apparent that dinnertime was coming and there were no food trucks booked for this event. We had better send the people away. But Jesus has other plans. **[SLIDE 17]** They scrounge up five loaves of bread and two fish and Jesus divides the people into groups and just like the good shepherd of Psalm 23, he lies them down in the green pasture. Most bible translations say that Jesus had the people sit down in the grass, the CEB is better, “He directed the disciples to seat all the people in groups as though they were having a banquet on the green grass.” That is a wonderful way of putting it. The Greek word used here is usually translated “to sit” but it actually means to recline **[SLIDE 18]** which is how people would sit at a banquet. In fact, Mark used the very same word in verse 26 when he was writing about the great banquet that Herod hosted. Jesus is about to do the same. We see the same word used to describe Herod’s banquet guests as well as his helpless crowd who has no food. He raises up the bread, gives thanks, breaks it and the disciples distribute it all out to the people until everyone, all 5,000 people, had eaten their fill with 12 baskets left over to boot. A banquet indeed.)) There is more to say about this story, and Jesus will revisit this event, but Mark is moving on…

 Verse 45 makes it sound like Jesus hops into a getaway car after a heist. **[SLIDE 19]** “Right then, Jesus made his disciples get into a boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake.” Then Jesus bids this disciples farewell and, finally, Jesus finds his connection to God that he had longed for. Up on a mountain, he is finally able to spend time in prayer alone. It feels like a deep breath here. Meanwhile the disciples are hanging out on a boat together in the middle of the night and the wind started picking up… From his vantage point, Jesus noticed the men struggling in the wind and he decides to simply walk out to them, because he can I suppose. But Jesus actual reason is a little strange…Mark reports in verse 48 that Jesus **[SLIDE 20]** intended to pass them by. This might seem odd to us but is a reference to the activity of God in parts of the Old Testament. In Exodus 33:19 Moses pleads with God to stay with him and his people. He expresses their dire need for God’s presence to remain among them and to go with them. Moses straight up asks God, “Show me your glory.” God tells Moses that he will make his goodness pass by Moses. So Moses is placed in the cleft of a rock and the glory of God passes by him. In 1 Kings 19 the prophet Elijah is on the run from the king and his entire army. Elijah is hiding in mountain caves and God meets with him there. Verse 11 reads, “The LORD said, ‘Go out and stand at the mountain before the LORD. The LORD is passing by.’” So now these disciples in the boat were about to have a Moses/Elijah like experience as the glory and presence of God almighty comes to pass by them, to strengthen them in their weakness, to encourage them in a time of need....but, they don’t get it. They don’t have a heartening experience, they are terrified because they think they have seen a ghost. Jesus responds to their screams, **[SLIDE 21]** “Be encouraged! It’s me. Don’t be afraid.” That is the English translation. but that is not quite what Jesus says here. In Greek it is **[SLIDE 22]** “*ego eimi*”. Jesus approaches these men while walking on the water declaring “I AM”! Be encouraged! Do not fear! I am! This of course is the very name of God. Yahweh in Hebrew. God reveals this name to Moses in the burning bush and here Jesus reveals it to the disciples on a stormy sea, yet…something is missing. They just don’t understand what Jesus is trying to say. The disciples have gone from a homerun, hitting it clean out of the park to striking out **[SLIDE 23]** here in the boat. Mark tells us in verse 51, they were so baffled they were beside themselves. That’s because they hadn’t understood about the loaves. Their hearts had been changed so that they resisted God’s ways. Well, that doesn’t sound good! Just earlier in the chapter Jesus was sending these same men out to heal people, to cast out demons, to preach the good news. They did it then! They understood at least well enough. But now there seems to be some sort of disconnect. As readers we are intrigued…we want to know what is going on here. But as readers, we are also confused. We identify with these disciples. **[SLIDE 24]** They are missing out on what the loaves mean…and so are we. We don’t get it either. We have our own examples of going from homeruns to strikeouts. But as these things come to light, and as Marks tells us more, there is one thing that is clear: **[SLIDE 25]** A disciple who fears is a disciple who cannot understand. The love of God casts out fear. And when the glory of God passes by, we ought to be encouraged, not afraid.

 Eventually the crew hit Gennesaret, and it is more of the same story from Mark. Large crowds flocking, people getting healed. Jesus had been refueled and the masses needed to experience the inbreaking of God’s kingdom among them! This the opposite of what Jesus experienced in Nazareth, much different from how the chapter began. The disciples are there too, seeing it all, and even though they might struggle with fear, even though they might be a little slow to understand, Jesus is not giving up on them, he has not condemned them. He is patient and kind, and we can all be thankful that he has plans in mind for imperfect disciples.

**[SLIDE 26]**

So what are we to make of chapter six? For me, as I read Mark overall, I feel at home with the disciples. I am in the same boat so to speak. I have had some high points in ministry, some good results, times when I knew I was on the right track and God was using me. But, even after “success” there are still a lot of questions. A successful disciple still doesn’t really know anything. They can still miss what God is doing even when he comes to pass by on the water.

 It is very interesting to me, that even though Mark has based his gospel on Peter’s own stories, Mark does not include **[SLIDE 27]** Peter walking out on the water with Jesus. We find the details about this in Matthew 14. Why did Mark leave out such an amazing story? We can only speculate. One reason may be that Mark’s gospel is about Jesus – not Peter. But it could be the case that Peter did not remember this story fondly. Maybe he felt ashamed at his fear of the waves and his lack of faith. Maybe, for Peter, this was not a story about an amazing feat but rather a memory of defeat.

**[SLIDE 28]**

 But as we follow up our homeruns with strikeouts, as imperfect as we are, as much as we want to send people away so they can find food and fend for themselves, Jesus looks upon us with compassion. We are his sheep - he is our shepherd. Can we rest in that reality? Can we allow him to lay us down on the green grass and feed us a banquet? I want to encourage you this week to take some time away to be with God. If Jesus needed that time away, we certainly do. Take a little drive, turn off the phone, turn off the TV, acknowledge your Good Shepherd. Let him care for you.

 Amen.