

Mark 3:7-12

7 Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; 8 hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. 9 He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; 10 for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. 11 Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" 12 But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

We are following the Gospel of Mark in chronological order to the resurrection. Last week we saw Jesus call his first disciples. After that he embarks on a ministry throughout Galilee preaching, healing, teaching, and encountering opposition. Then he returns to the sea. This brings us to the Scripture for today. We see Jesus with his early disciples and a large crowd is following him as he goes through the area and arrives at the edge of the sea.

The Gospel of Mark tells us that those that were sick and needed healing were pressing to get to Jesus. From other places in the Bible we learn there are several reasons for the crowd. Jesus' healing and exorcism is one of them. Some follow after they were healed because they were in awe and highly appreciative. The healing power of Jesus shows that he has power over evil. This is evidence of his divine status. Some people follow Jesus due to general excitement. People get excited about something new and different, and they want to be a part of that excitement. Some follow Jesus due to his teaching with authority. It is not like the status quo of the religious leaders so they want to know more; they want to learn from Jesus. The opposition is also following Jesus to hear what he has to say and see what he does because they want to find a way to stop him.

We learn from the Gospels that they crowd mentality is not the same as discipleship. The crowd wants something from Jesus. The crowd does not really give up anything to follow Jesus. The crowd will not change from a life of selfish ambition, transgression, or self righteous in order to be devoted to God and the teaching of Jesus. The disciples are a very small segment of the crowd, only twelve out of the multitude are truly willing and able to give up a life that they are accustomed to in order to be disciples of Jesus.

The Gospel of Marks shows physical, geographical movement. It shows Jesus calling his disciples at the Sea of Galilee. It shows Jesus as he goes throughout Galilee preaching, teaching, and healing. Then it shows him return to the sea. The Gospel of Mark also shows a movement of popularity. Jesus leaves the sea with only four disciples and he only goes about Galilee, the northern section of ancient Palestine. The ancient historian Josephus reports that Northern Galilee is about 180 square miles and Southern Galilee is about 470 square miles. This area is 650 square miles combined which is less than the average county here in the United States.

At this time he has not covered the rest of Palestine or any of the outlining areas, but he returns to the sea with a large crowd. Jesus is powerful in word and in deed and he creates a powerful movement where people are impressed with his teaching and witness his healing. As the news spreads, it gains excitement that is so great that it spreads beyond the confines of Galilee and widens even beyond Palestine. As the crowd that follows Jesus grows, the opposition against him also increases. The Pharisees conspire to kill him because they have no interest in the will of God; instead they accuse him of blasphemy.

When Jesus returns to the Sea of Galilee, he has only covered a small area but he has a large crowd pressing because they have come from the surrounding area. The Gospel of Mark gives us some specific details. They came from Judea this is 75 to 80 miles away. They came from Jerusalem, which is located in Judea. They also came from Idumea, this is beyond the Jordan. And they came from Tyre and Sidon, which is to the north. What the Gospel of Mark points out is that the news of the healing power of Jesus has spread throughout a wide area that includes other areas of ancient Palestine and into areas outside of Palestine. Very early in his ministry his reputation has spread to areas that he has not preached in or visited. So many people want him that the crowd could actually crush him. So, he has his disciples prepare a boat in order to give him a place to preach from where he will not get crushed by the crowd. A lot of people are pressing toward him because everybody wants something from Jesus.

When the demons fell down before him, they shouted “You are the Son of God!” The Gospel of Mark introduces Jesus as the Son of God. At his baptism a voice from heaven proclaims “You are my Son.” The Gospel continues to demonstrate his divine nature through his ability to resist temptation, overcome evil, and heal people. Now the demons proclaim “You are the Son of God!”

The Scripture lesson is on the identity of Jesus and the response to him. The lesson for us is in the contrast between the crowd that follows Jesus and the disciples of Jesus. The large crowd is not devoted. They want something from Jesus. Whereas, the disciples are few, they are devoted to Jesus and his ministry. Instead of wanting something from Jesus they offer themselves to his mission. This is applicable in contemporary society. Most people are just in the crowd. Whereas a very few are actually devoted to Jesus and continue his mission.