

Jonathan Mark
FMC Reedley
Mark 2:13-17
2/4/2024

“The Sick Have Their Say”

Good Morning Church. Today’s Gospel of Mark text has been one I have chewed on for some time. This is a quintessential passage about how Jesus gets in trouble for associating with unsavory characters. Jesus is the one who seeks after the lost sheep, tells us to have the faith of children, and says women have just as much of a right to be taught as men. Jesus has a special heart for the tax collectors, calling Levi an original apostle, noticing Zacchaeus from the crowd, and honoring the repentant tax collector above a self-righteous religious leader.

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be pleasing to you—our welcome and belonging.

Is welcoming each other the most important thing we do every Sunday morning? How were you welcomed today?

Today, Ro welcomed you here with the words of welcome, right? A reassurance that all people are welcome. Or was it an usher who welcomed you, handing you a bulletin so you had the inside knowledge, the call to worship, words to say, the hymns to sing? Perhaps a friend or a pastor made you feel welcome as you shook hands and said good morning. Either way, there is power in a welcome. Unless you have found some sort of self-assurance that is beyond my understanding, welcome is how I know that I belong. Welcome is how I know I am where I am supposed to be.

We know the importance of welcome through the pain of its absence. Peace be with you, returned by a hard face and turning away—a remark of how “those kinds of people” should not be in the choir or leadership. I remember a meeting where someone quoted this scripture at me, saying everyone needs the church, but just so long as we remember, they are sinners to be kept at arm's length. I know I’ve felt that unwelcome many times in my life. And when I sense it, all I want to do is run away. Maybe it is knowing that pain that I do not want anyone else to feel that way.

How were you welcomed today? As someone who belonged?

So today, we look at Jesus eating and drinking with tax collectors. Extending a kind of welcome they would not be able to get from other religious leaders. When the scribes and Pharisees pressed Jesus for why he was doing this, he explained that he was a physician who came for the sick.

But who are the sick anyway? It is a metaphor, is it not? When I hear those words, I feel a pinch. Am I one of the sick? Perhaps we are all sick, people who need Jesus because none of us here are perfect. Because some thought sickness resulted from sin, remember John 9, who sinned that this man was born blind.

But as I look at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, I see stories of people with unclean spirits, demons, skin diseases, and a paralytic all coming to Jesus to be healed. It is not so much that Jesus is welcoming the sick out of an abundance of kindness. The sick are Jesus's people, Jesus's mission. As I think about this, it seems like the sick are at the center of attention, and it is the scribes and Pharisees; the good religious people who are on the outside do not understand the good news that Jesus is bringing. Its obvious when I read it again, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

How were you welcomed today? As someone who needed Jesus?

What would the church look like if we took the righteous out of the center? I get stuck thinking that the church is made up of the righteous ones welcoming sinners as if we were Jesus. But what if the church is here for sinners and marginalized, for the lost sheep to find a home? What if the more righteous we become, the harder it is to see and understand the good news? What if it is the righteous who must wait to be welcomed by the sick. ? Let the sick have their say.